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ABSTRACT

The rural school superintendency is, in many ways, as demanding and difficult as the urban superintendency. Chapter 1 of this book provides a working definition of a rural small school district, an estimation of the number of rural systems in the nation that fit the criteria, and a profile of rural small school superintendents. Chapter 2 discusses the basic nature of the work of rural superintendents and the roles they perform. Chapter 3 describes the advantages and problems with rural school districts in the areas of community relationships and control, finance, administration, teachers, students, and curriculum and instruction. It also discusses the lingering problems of financing and staffing rural small schools. Chapter 4 considers possible rewards of the rural superintendent in terms of pay, fringe benefits, and job security. Chapter 5 reviews new pressures facing rural education such as changing enrollment patterns, fiscal constraints, school improvement initiatives, and family choice options. The book concludes with recommendations for a new commitment at the local, state, and national levels to develop comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive policies that will strengthen and enrich the rural small school superintendent. (KS)

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Contents

Table of Tables v

Table of Figures vi

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction xi

Chapter 1 1
How Many Rural Superintendents?

Chapter 2 25
Roles Expected, Skills Needed

Chapter 3 35
The Challenging, Changing Work Environment

Chapter 4 58
Rewarding the Rural Superintendent

Chapter 5 59
New Pressures in Rural Education

Chapter 6 71
How to Help the Rural Superintendent

About the Authors 91

Table of Tables

Table		*Page*
1.1	Number of Public School Systems, Enrollment, and Schools, By Size of System: United States, Fall 1983	6
1.2	Public School Systems By Enrollment Size and States: 1982	8
1.3	Local Governments and Public School Systems Inside and Outside Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 1982	12
1.4	Nachtigal's Three Categories of Rural Communities	14
1.5	A Comparison of Selected Demographic Characteristics of Rural and All Other Superintendents	15
1.6	Selected Data on the Career Patterns of Rural Small School Superintendents, 1984-85	18
1.7	Superintendents' Satisfication with Present Position	20
1.8	Career Plans of Superintendents	21
3.1	Per-Pupil Expenditures for Current Operation	46
3.2	Comparison of Total Budgeted Expenditures of Rural Small and All Other Enrollment Size Districts, 1985-86	48
3.3	ERS Comparison of Mean Number of Pupils Per Professional and Per Administrative Staff Member, 1985-86	49
3.4	ERS Comparison of Mean Number of Teachers Per Professional and Per Administrative Staff Member, 1985-86	50
4.1	Contract Salaries Paid Superintendents, 1985-86 School Year	54
4.2	Superintendents' Views on Appropriateness of Present Monetary Compensation	55
4.3	Salary Increases Needed by Superintendents Dissatisfied with Present Salary	56

Table of Figures

Figure		*Page*
1.1	Illustrative Career Routes of Three "Typical" Rural Small School Superintendents	17
2.1	The Quality of Work Life of the Rural Small School Superintendent	27
6.1	The Goal: Development of Comprehensive, Integrated, and Cohesive Policies for Enhancing the Quality of Work Life of the Rural Small School Superintendent	73

Preface

This statement relies heavily on our personal experiences and judgments. Early in our professional careers, we both were classroom teachers and served as superintendents of schools in rural communities. We have retained a continuing interest in rural schools as part of our professional responsibilities and activities for the past 20 years.

E. Robert Stephens
Walter G. Turner

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Introduction

The classic view of the chief executive officer in corporate America is of a person atop a charging white horse, saber flashing, meeting the competition head-on, and all alone! This is the stuff of movies, television series, and countless books and articles.

Such a view of the chief executive in the private sector carries over to education but often strangely seems to be reserved only for the urban school superintendents. They indeed have been in the forefront of education for much of the past quarter century and sometimes seem alone and beleaguered.

However, we contend that this widely held view of the urban school superintendent probably always has been equally true of rural small school superintendents. Further, events of recent years suggest they deserve that description even more than their urban counterparts.

However, this essay does not make a case for pitting the plight of the rural small school superintendent against that of urban colleagues. Rather, it calls attention to the rural small school superintendency. Numerous and potentially meaningful school improvement initiatives under way in many states to enhance elementary and secondary education will succeed only if two things happen: the quality of the large number of rural small school superintendencies found in most states is improved, and the quality of work life for individuals who occupy these critical leadership positions is enhanced.[1]

Rural Schools: Here to Stay

Many states always will have large numbers of rural small school districts. The creation of larger school districts that make good educational sense should and will receive public support, but further use of this policy option will be limited. First, the massive school reorganization that touched virtually every state in the immediate post-World War II period rested on a research base that is now widely acknowledged to be flawed.[2] Second, rural interests in many states are better organized today than in the past to resist indiscriminate use of mandated school district consolidation. Third, continued consolidation of districts will be difficult and not cost-efficient in many areas because of the distances involved. And last, alternative ways to

provide a good education in rural areas, such as telecommunications, lessen the need for reorganization.

Changes ahead in rural America will profoundly affect education in a rural setting. Neal E. Harl, economist at Iowa State University, notes that agriculture is "going through the most wrenching adjustment in half a century" and predicts these changes will impact substantially on both the supply of and demand for rural education.[3] However, for the reasons stated earlier, drastic reorganization of elementary and secondary schools is not likely in the near future. The many rural small school districts will continue to be headed by individuals who desperately need attention and vastly improved assistance if their school improvement initiatives are to be successful.

Paul Nachtigal, editor, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., urges all of the nation to "accept the reality of rural America and, by extension, the continued presence of rural schools."[4] We agree. Rural schools are going to be with us for some time. The challenge and the responsibility of the policy and professional communities are to build on the strengths of rural small schools and design policies that will help them overcome their problems. A major focus of new policy and program initiatives should be on the needs of the rural small school superintendent.

What Follows

This publication, based substantially on the views of the authors, contends the rural school superintendency is, in many ways, as demanding and difficult as the urban superintendency. First, it provides data -- a working definition of a rural small school district, an estimation of the number of rural systems in the nation that fit the criteria, and a profile of rural small school superintendents (Chapter 1). It then establishes some of the important dimensions of the quality of work life of the rural superintendent. Clearly, there are many aspects of the work life that profoundly affect a rural superintendent, but this focus is on three major ones: the basic nature of his or her work (Chapter 2), public and professional expectations for the position (Chapter 3), and the reward system for rural superintendents (Chapter 4).

Leadership for Rural Schools then discusses new pressures confronting the superintendent (Chapter 5). It concludes with recommendations for a new commitment at the local, state, and national levels to develop comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive policies that will strengthen and enrich the rural small school superintendent (Chapter 6).

Notes/References

1. The emphasis in this statement on what is regarded to be the pivotal role played by the superintendent in rural school improvement efforts is not intended to suggest a secondary role for school-based administrators, particularly principals. In rural communities fortunate enough to employ full-time principals, these individuals are critical to the achievement of high standards. For a discussion of the rural school principalship, see especially *The Principalship in Rural America*, Alfred A. Wilson, Educational Resources Information Center, Clearing house on Rural Education and Small Schools, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, N. Mex., January 1982; and *The Rural and Small School Principalship*, Edward R. Ducharme and Douglas S. Fleming, editors, Northeast Regional Exchange, Inc., Chelmsford, Mass., December 1985.

2. For a good critique of the research literature on school district reorganization, see: Educational Research Service, *Size of Schools and School Districts*, Information Aid No. 8, Washington, D.C., 1971; ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, "School Size: A Reassessment of the Small School," Research Action Brief, Number 21, February 1982; William F. Fox, "Reviewing Economics of Size in Education," *Journal of Education Finance*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Winter 1981, pp. 273-296; and James W. Guthrie et al., "Organization Scale and School Issues," Chapter V, *Education Finance and Organization Research Perspectives for the Future*.

3. Harl, Neal P., "The Changing Rural Economy: Implications for Rural America," keynote address presented at the 1985 National Rural Education Forum sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Kansas City, Mo., August 12, 1985 (unpublished).

4. Nachtigal, Paul, "Theme V: Accepting Rural Reality," Chapter 19, *Rural Education: In Search of a Better Way*, Paul M. Nachtigal, editor, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 1982, pp. 301-311.

1

How Many Rural Superintendents?

"Being a rural superintendent is very different, in terms of human relations. The superintendent is the only one appointed to represent the people but, at the same time, each group in the community thinks you're there to be their advocate. This job is a series of juxtaposed positions. The teachers' union thinks you're good because you represent educators to the board, or bad because you don't agree with them on salaries. Parents expect you to stand up for their kids, but you have to protect the privacy of the staff and not reveal what action you take, if any. If you discuss too many things with the school board, it gets the idea you can't handle the job; if you don't say enough, it believes you're close-mouthed and authoritarian. In the community, you have to be an even better role model than the teachers. And there's no one to talk to about all of these things. If you're married, you can go home and spill it all out on your spouse. If you're not married, you can tell it to your dog. My two dogs have learned a lot."

Charlotte Gregory, Superintendent
Bath Central School, Bath, N.Y.

How many rural small school superintendents are there? Arriving at an exact number is difficult, primarily because of different criteria used to define a rural small school district.

A number of ways to agree on criteria have been suggested over the years. In 1952, J. E. Butterworth and Howard A. Dawson offered this definition:

> It is a school that serves an area of relatively sparse population.... 2. It is a school that serves the whole rural community, including a hamlet or a village and its surrounding open-country territory. 3. It is a school that includes

> both elementary and secondary grades. 4. While, dominantly, the rural school in the United States is one located in an agriculture area, it does not exclude the schools serving other occupational groups in sparsely settled regions. Not infrequently there are villages within the accepted population limit that are devoted largely to fishing, to mining, or to lumbering. These are rural as here defined because their educational problems are, in general, similar to the problems of other relatively sparsely populated areas.[1]

This definition illustrates how important it is to consider areas other than farming as "rural," such as fishing, mining, or lumbering communities. Many writers in the Fifties equated rural with agriculture and ignored all other schools serving sparsely populated regions. Typical of these narrower definitions was the one by F. W. Reeves who, in 1945, stated that the term rural refers "primarily to agricultural communities with no population center as large as twenty-five hundred."[2]

In the mid-1980s, a panel of rural school administrators formed by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), under contract with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, completed an extensive review of current definitions used by federal agencies, state education agencies, professional groups, and those found in the literature.[3] The AASA panel reported that a number of criteria (e.g., sparsity or density of population, isolation or distance to urban centers/geographic location, smallness in size, economic and social conditions, sociocultural values, occupation of residents) are to be found in the literature or used by governmental agencies in defining a rural school district. The comprehensiveness of the definitions used by a single author or agency, however, varied substantially.

For example, Doris Helge, executive director of the American Council on Rural Special Education, defines a rural school as follows:

> "A district (or cooperative) is identified as rural when the number of inhabitants is less than 150 per square mile or when located in counties with 60 percent or more of the population living in communities no larger than 5,000 inhabitants. Districts with more than 10,000 students and those within a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau, are not considered rural."[4]

The AASA study cites several other proposed definitions. One recommends the use of four categories based on population density:

> ***Non-metropolitan county:*** all school districts that lie in non-metropolitan counties as defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), i.e., counties that are not part of some SMSA (county within a city of 50,000 or more).
>
> ***Minimally urbanized county:*** all school districts in a minimally urbanized county, or a county containing no city with a population of 10,000 or more.
>
> ***Remote county:*** school districts in non-metropolitan counties having fewer than 20,000 urban residents that are not adjacent to an SMSA.
>
> ***Sparsely settled district:*** non-metropolitan school districts with 100 percent rural population, or all its students were drawn from communities no larger than 2,500 (Bureau of the Census criterion of rural).[5]

The National Assessment of Educational Progress also makes use of four categories, but incorporates an occupational factor (farmers or farm workers) in two of its four designations:

> ***Extreme rural.*** These schools are in areas where a high proportion of the residents are farmers or farm workers. At least some of the enrollment is from open country or places of less than 2,500 population: no enrollment is from places greater than 10,000, and none is from suburbs of large cities.
>
> ***Small places.*** Schools in this group are located in open country or places with populations of less than 25,000, not including those in the extreme-rural category.
>
> ***Smaller places.*** Students in this group attend schools in communities having a population of less than 25,000 and which are not in the fringes-around-big-cities category.
>
> ***Fringes around big cities.*** Students in this group attend schools in areas with a population under 10,000 where most of the residents are farmers or farm workers.[6]

A less ambitious definition in the AASA compilation is the Office of Management and Budget's straightforward one: "A 'rural' school district is any district in a non-metropolitan county, i.e., a county that doesn't have a city of 50,000 or more residents."[7]

In offering its recommended definition, the AASA panel incorporated both an isolation factor and a population sparsity factor of the community served by the school district. In addition, it recommended that, while a district may be both rural and small, it is important that a distinction be made between the two types. The panel recommended:

> A *community* may be considered *rural* if it meets one of two criteria:
>
> ***Isolation.*** 25 miles or more from a city or town of 50,000, and not a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.
>
> ***Population sparsity.*** 200 or fewer permanent residents per square mile.
>
> A *rural school district* is defined as one within a rural community or in a county where 60 percent or more of the communities are rural.
>
> A *small school district* is one with a student enrollment of 2,500 or less.[8]

A Working Definition

A good working definition of a rural school should include characteristics of the community served by the school that enjoys widespread, conventional usage and, thus, more easily is identified in the policy and professional communities. The characteristics of isolation and population sparsity are two factors generally thought of in reference to rural communities.

This working definition defines a rural small school district as one that: enrolls fewer than 2,500 students in grades K-12 and is located approximately 25 miles outside of an urban center with a population of 50,000 or more.

The frequently used criterion of proximity to a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) is of little use, primarily because an SMSA includes the entire county having an urban center of 50,000 or more. There are numerous rural small school systems in counties designated as SMSAs that would be excluded from these calculations if this criterion is used.

In addition, a good working definition of a rural small school district should consider the important variable of the K-12 size of enrollment. An enrollment figure of no more than 2,500 students is a useful upper limit to designate a small K-12 district. Districts with enrollments of more than this tend to have a different mix of programming, staffing, and, in many cases, financial resources.

This working definition, then, makes use of a combination of community characteristics and enrollment size of the school system. However, it complicates the process of arriving at an estimate of the number of rural small schools and, consequently, the number of superintendents serving in rural small school districts. Also, the combination of factors used in the definition ignores other school systems that in many ways serve rural communities in every conventional sense of the term; particularly countywide local districts found in many southeastern states with total enrollments in grades K-12 that exceed 2,500, but clearly are serving predominantly rural communities.

Estimating the Number of Rural Small School Districts

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were 15,398 operating public school systems in the nation in the fall of 1983. As shown in Table 1.1, 11,848 or 75.3 percent of these systems had enrollments of 2,500 or fewer students. These systems enrolled approximately 8.7 million students, or 22.2 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary public school population.

All states have small-enrollment districts, according to another source of data -- the U.S. Census Bureau. Using a slightly different procedure for counting school district governments than does the U.S. Department of Education, the Census Bureau reported that all 50 states had large numbers of small districts in 1982 (Table 1.2).

These sources confirm that the vast majority of local school systems have K-12 enrollments of fewer than 2,500 students and that districts of this size are to be found in all states. To estimate the number enrolling fewer than 2,500 students, this study uses data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. It reports that 9,848, or approximately 60 percent, of all school districts in 1982-83 were located outside of an SMSA (Table 1.3). The great majority of these districts, 8,617 systems, enrolled fewer than 2,500 students in grades K-12.

TABLE 1.1

NUMBER OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS, ENROLLMENT, AND SCHOOLS BY SIZE OF SYSTEM: UNITED STATES, FALL 1983

	School Systems		Enrollment [1]		Number of Schools	
Enrollment Size	Number	Percent	Number (in Thousands)	Percent	Number	Percent
25,000 or more	161	1.0	10,257	26.1	15,346	18.6
10,000 to 24,999	456	2.9	6,743	17.1	11,383	13.8
5,000 to 9,999	970	6.2	6,780	17.2	12,386	15.0
2,500 to 4,999	1,963	12.5	6,845	17.4	13,823	16.7
1,000 to 2,499	3,545	22.5	5,777	14.7	14,448	17.5
600 to 999	1,813	11.5	1,420	3.6	4,824	5.8
300 to 599	2,293	14.6	1,000	2.5	4,794	5.8
1 to 299	4,197	26.7	534	1.4	5,703	6.9
None [2]	349	2.2	0	---	8	---
Total	15,747	100.0	39,355	100.0	82,715	100.0

1) Data are for Fall 1982.

2) Systems not enrolling students.

NOTE: Enrollments and numbers of schools should be regarded as approximations only. These totals differ from those in other tables because this table represents data reported by school systems rather than by states. Because of rounding, details may not add to totals.

SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics, 1985-86*, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Center for Statistics, Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. (Table 55, p. 64).

Thus, a minimum of 8,617 of the nation's school systems are rural small school districts. To this base figure needs to be added another 500 districts from the approximately 4,000 small-enrollment districts located inside an SMSA but not in one of the larger SMSAs (having an urban center with a population of 50,000 or more). Adding these figures, the study concludes that there are approximately 9,100 rural small school districts in the nation, or approximately 60 percent of the total number of districts.

Rural, Small, but Different

Being rural and small doesn't mean being homogenized. School districts in this study are very different from each other. They, of course, vary in enrollment. Districts of 300 enrollment might well be as different from a school system of 2,000 students as would a system of 2,000 students be from one of 10,000 students.

In recent years some scholars have begun to develop taxonomies of rural schools. In 1982, Tom Gjelten, based on his work with the National Rural Center, stated that "...despite their homogeneity, very small school districts in this country are as different from each other as they are from suburban or urban school systems."[9] His system for typing rural schools, using socioeconomic, cultural, and demographic features, resulted in five classes of districts: stable, depressed, high growth, reborn, and isolated. Gjelten then sketched some of the more significant differences and needs among various types of rural districts:

> "The stable districts, for example, have relatively few problems and tend to provide the best education I have seen in the country. Reborn communities are experiencing new energies from city people who are relocating in them but tend to clash with the traditional values of the community. And in isolated districts, where students have little contact with the outside world, it is a profound decision for youth to leave the community, yet they are."[10]

Paul Nachtigal's work on rural school improvement has made a significant contribution to the debate over public policies for education in a rural setting and it has guided this study in many ways.[11] Nachtigal describes three categories of rural communities (Table 1.4).

Nachtigal's Descriptions. In his discussion of these categories, Nachtigal provides descriptions as well as examples:

> The first category of rural America, The Rural Poor ... by almost any measure of the good life is well below the national average: lower median income, lower level of educational development, higher mortality rate, and lower level of political power and therefore self-determination.... Appalachian coal towns and delta communities of the lower Mississippi are examples of these social/economic/political conditions. Under such conditions, implementing the 'in school' educational improvement strategies is likely to meet with little success.[12]

TABLE 1.2

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE AND STATES: 1982

State	All systems	Independent school districts											
		Total	Enrollment-size group: 100,000 or more	50,000 to 99,999	25,000 to 49,999	10,000 to 24,999	5,000 to 9,999	2,500 to 4,999	1,000 to 2,499	500 to 999	250 to 499	100 to 249	Less than 100
United States	16,389	14,851	11	36	106	427	893	1,751	3,404	2,433	2,112	1,667	2,011
Alabama	127	127	-	1	4	4	31	43	40	3	-	1	-
Alaska	52	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arizona	245	232	-	2	1	9	14	24	49	29	20	31	53
Arkansas	372	372	-	-	1	3	8	26	67	108	102	52	5
California	1,164	1,111	3	3	27	98	128	111	183	146	148	135	129
Colorado	185	185	-	2	1	12	6	15	38	23	36	34	18
Connecticut	166	16	-	-	-	-	-	2	9	4	1	-	-
Delaware	19	19	-	-	-	3	4	6	5	1	-	-	-
District of Columbia	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Florida	95	93	1	5	7	18	21	22	14	5	-	-	-
Georgia	187	187	-	3	7	6	27	60	70	10	3	1	-
Hawaii	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Idaho	117	117	-	-	-	3	6	15	25	24	20	15	6
Illinois	1,049	1,049	1	-	2	22	49	96	261	251	191	123	53
Indiana	305	305	-	1	2	15	29	60	152	29	12	4	1
Iowa	456	456	-	-	1	6	12	19	82	154	144	38	-
Kansas	326	326	-	-	2	2	8	20	68	97	79	49	1
Kentucky	180	180	-	1	1	4	22	54	64	21	11	2	-
Louisiana	66	66	-	3	4	14	20	19	6	-	-	-	-
Maine	294	98	-	-	-	-	-	9	37	19	11	4	18
Maryland	41	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Massachusetts	435	81	-	-	-	-	-	5	42	25	7	2	-
Michigan	599	599	1	-	6	23	53	116	225	89	28	21	37
Minnesota	436	436	-	-	3	7	18	40	85	113	124	42	4
Mississippi	173	169	-	-	1	1	19	35	81	10	2	-	-
Missouri	557	557	-	1	2	11	21	31	111	127	113	84	56
Montana	399	399	-	-	-	2	3	4	20	40	45	80	205
Nebraska	1,069	1,069	-	-	2	1	7	9	24	48	101	136	741
Nevada	17	17	-	1	1	-	1	4	6	1	1	2	4
New Hampshire	169	160	-	-	-	-	-	9	33	23	27	31	37
New Jersey	624	548	-	-	-	7	30	77	153	101	88	59	33
New Mexico	89	89	-	1	-	3	10	10	14	18	15	15	3
New York	761	726	-	-	-	17	74	140	266	107	71	31	20
North Carolina	201	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
North Dakota	325	325	-	-	-	-	4	6	4	26	61	100	124
Ohio	669	669	-	3	4	15	52	152	303	114	18	2	6
Oklahoma	638	638	-	-	2	5	10	22	71	104	168	153	103
Oregon	352	352	-	1	-	6	21	26	54	42	37	56	109
Pennsylvania	514	514	1	-	1	9	64	183	228	25	3	-	-
Rhode Island	40	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-
South Carolina	92	92	-	1	2	15	20	23	25	6	-	-	-
South Dakota	196	196	-	-	-	3	-	7	16	32	60	61	17
Tennessee	147	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	2	3	1	-
Texas	1,124	1,124	2	4	16	46	45	133	219	204	202	170	83
Utah	40	40	-	2	2	5	7	7	8	6	2	1	-
Vermont	273	273	-	-	-	-	-	2	17	37	48	65	104
Virginia	139	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Washington	300	300	-	-	3	16	22	33	55	55	38	38	40
West Virginia	55	55	-	-	1	11	18	12	13	-	-	-	-
Wisconsin	449	408	-	1	-	3	7	34	129	138	69	22	5
Wyoming	56	56	-	-	-	2	2	6	21	15	7	3	-

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TABLE 1.2 (continued)

State	Total	100,000 or more	50,000 to 99,999	25,000 to 49,999	10,000 to 24,999	5,000 to 9,999	2,500 to 4,999	1,000 to 2,499	500 to 999	250 to 499	100 to 249	Less than 100
	Dependent public school systems											
	Enrollment-size group											
United States	1,538	7	11	18	101	206	315	312	133	123	109	203
Alabama	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Alaska	52	-	-	1	1	2	1	7	9	12	15	4
Arizona	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	12
Arkansas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
California	53	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	8	16	11	11
Colorado	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Connecticut	150	-	-	-	6	22	39	37	13	18	12	3
Delaware	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
District of Columbia	2	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-		
Florida	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Georgia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hawaii	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Idaho	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Illinois	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Indiana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iowa	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kansas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kentucky	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Louisiana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Maine	196	-	-	-	-	2	11	28	13	20	33	89
Maryland	41	2	3	1	12	7	8	6	2	-	-	-
Massachusetts	354	-	1	-	9	33	72	65	39	33	28	74
Michigan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Minnesota	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mississippi	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	-
Missouri	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Montana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nebraska	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nevada	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
New Hampshire	9	-	-	-	2	-	4	3	-	-	-	-
New Jersey	76	-	2	1	9	12	15	12	9	8	7	3
New Mexico	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
New York	35	2	-	2	6	8	9	8	-	-	-	-
North Carolina	201	-	2	3	26	42	51	56	17	2	1	1
North Dakota	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ohio	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Oklahoma	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Oregon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pennsylvania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rhode Island	37	-	-	-	3	4	16	6	3	4	-	1
South Carolina	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Dakota	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tennessee	132	1	1	4	7	33	43	25	11	5	1	1
Texas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Utah	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vermont	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Virginia	139	1	1	6	14	28	33	43	5	3	1	4
Washington	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
West Virginia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wisconsin	41	-	-	-	5	13	12	10	1	-	-	-
Wyoming	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

SOURCE: 1982 Census of Governments, Volume 1, Governmental Organization, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, August, 1983, Table 11, p. 17.

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The second category, *Traditional Middle America*, includes many of the Midwestern agriculture-based communities:

> Though not wealthy in terms of millionaire status, in comparison to the Rural Poor, these communities are well off. Solid family life, well-kept homes, and a puritan work ethic assure a high level of achievement at both school and the workplace. Power structures are relatively open and political participation broad-based. Resources for educational improvement in terms of both money and people are available. School improvement strategies most useful to these communities would be those designed to serve as a catalyst, to stir school personnel and community leaders to re-examine practices and dream of better things.[13]

In the third and final category, *Communities in Transition*, Nachtigal finds:

> Recreation, energy developments, or proximity to urban areas that allows communities to enjoy the rural life have resulted in an influx of outsiders who bring with them different ideas, different value systems, and new demands for services. Here the social structure is in a state of flux, and conflict between the old and the new is almost always focused on the school, as it still serves as the hub of the small-town social structure.[14]

Nachtigal sums up his observations:

> The rich diversity that characterizes rural communities is not so clearly reflected in the rural schools. One hundred years of implementing a common school system policy has resulted in more similarities than differences. The differences, however, are critical, as they have persevered in spite of efforts to provide equal -- which has generally been interpreted to mean identical -- educational opportunities. The differences have persevered because the linkages between rural schools and communities are still strong enough to offset the pressures of standardization that come from the one best system. Here again the differences are related to economic resources, cultural priorities, commonality of purpose, and political efficacy.[15]

Croft's Five Types. A third attempt at providing a typology of rural districts is that by Don Croft of New Mexico State University. Croft, like Gjelten, also makes use of five categories in classifying typical school systems:

> ***Remedial--Meeting minimum standards.*** Most students are below grade level in achievement. Classes offered are primarily remedial. Students may be bilingual or need to learn English better. May be discipline problems.
>
> ***Decremental--Declining enrollment and finances.*** Most students achieving at grade level. However, enrollment and financial assistance are declining. Some consolidation of curriculum occurring, teacher overload, and difficulty in providing comprehensive range of classes.
>
> ***Incremental--Increasing enrollment and finances.*** Most students achieving at grade level, and school is typical of a well-operated school. School is ready to broaden class offerings and introduce innovative programs.
>
> ***Major expansive--Rapidly increasing enrollment.*** Students achieving at grade level, but school has a great influx of new students. School needs more of the basic curriculum, as well as expanded offerings in new areas.
>
> ***Exemplary--Students achieve well above grade level.*** District has comprehensive curriculum, but needs state of the art programs to satisfy needs of students and parents. Students primarily attend prestigious colleges.[16]

Croft's rural school district taxonomy uses the independent variables of isolation (distance from SMSA, community population density) and county economic base, and three dependent variables (selected school characteristics, selected teacher attributes, and selected student attributes).[17]

The work of Gjelten, Nachtigal, and Croft has contributed greatly to an understanding of the differences among rural school districts. Although full descriptions of rural districts are not yet pinned down, progress is clearly being made to address the deep concerns raised by researcher/author Jonathan Sher in 1976:

TABLE 1.3

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE STANDARD METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS, 1982

United States

Enrollment Size [1]	Total	Inside SMSAs	Outside SMSAs	Percent Outside SMSAs
100,000 or more pupils	18	18	---	none
50,000 to 99,999 pupils	47	47	---	none
25,000 to 49,999 pupils	124	124	---	none
10,000 to 24,999 pupils	528	468	60	11.3
5,000 to 9,999 pupils	1,099	774	325	29.5
2,500 to 4,999 pupils	2,066	1,220	846	40.9
1,000 to 2,499 pupils	3,716	1,729	1,987	53.4
500 to 999 pupils	2,566	855	1,711	66.6
250 to 499 pupils	2,235	547	1,688	75.5
100 to 249 pupils	1,776	400	1,376	77.4
1 to 99 pupils	1,844	252	1,592	86.3
none	370	107	263	71.0
Total	16,389	6,541	9,848	60.0

1) Enrollment size as of October, 1981.

SOURCE: Data compiled from 1982 Census of Governments, Volume 1, Governmental Organization, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, August, 1983, Table 14, p. 46.

> "The point is that rural America is far too heterogeneous and complex to be amenable to simplistic definitions or comfortable stereotypes ... like rural America as a whole, rural schools and school districts are distinguished by their diversity. Despite increasing standardization, rural schools still tend to reflect the pluralism found among the rural communities they serve ... as a consequence, treating rural schools and school districts as if they were a unified, monolithic entity would be a serious mistake."[18]

A Growing Need. Two years ago, Robert Stephens of the University of Maryland argued for a taxonomy of rural schools as one of several research initiatives directed at finding answers to help policy making about rural schools:

> "The need for a valid taxonomy of rural schools is uppermost. This step is an important prerequisite for the design of appropriate research that would attempt to compare schools that serve rural populations. To aid this long-term effort, we need to identify the characteristics of the external environments in which rural schools function, their mode of operation, and their products, the three generally accepted central considerations in taxonomic efforts and, ultimately, to meaningful comparative evaluations."[19]

Even though the field presently is without a widely accepted typology of rural schools, a good case has been made for differing needs of rural school districts beyond those related to enrollment, isolation, fiscal support base, and the economy of the community.

Estimating the Number of Rural Small School Superintendents

Arriving at an estimate of the number of rural small school superintendents involves another two-step process:

- Subtracting from the projected number of 9,100 rural school districts the estimated number of rural systems that are one-teacher units.
- Subtracting from this figure the estimated number of districts that are part of a multi-district superintendency arrangement.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were 798 one-teacher schools in the nation in 1982-83.[20] However, many of these were part of a larger system that operated one or more one-teacher buildings. The assumption is made here that the vast majority (if not all) of one-teacher schools serve only elementary school students. Further, whatever one-teacher schools that are K-12 school districts are headed by an individual who probably assumes all of the instructional and management functions that go on in the district. This study excludes these individuals in its estimate of the number of rural small school superintendents.

TABLE 1.4

NACHTIGAL'S THREE CATEGORIES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

	Values	Socioeconomic Factors	Political Structure/ Focus of Control	Priorities for Schools
I. Rural Poor	Traditional/ commonly held	Fairly homogeneous/low income	Closed, concentrated, often lie outside local community	Mixed and low
II. Traditional Middle America	Traditional/ commonly held	Fairly homogeneous/middle income	More open/ widely dispersed	High
III. Communities in Transition	Wide range represented	Wide range/low to high income	Shifting from "old-timers" to "newcomers"	Wide range, resulting in school being battleground

SOURCE: "Rural America: Multiple Realities," Paul Nachtigal, Chapter 16, *Rural Education in Search of a Better Way*, Paul M. Nachtigal, Editor, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1982, Table 16.1, p. 274.

The final step in the calculation subtracts those superintendents who serve multiple rural school districts, because the problems and issues confronting the multi-district superintendency are even more complex than the profile of the single-district rural school superintendency being sketched here. Exploratory work by Charles Sederberg of the University of Minnesota estimates that in 1983-84 there were approximately 400 rural school districts, in a sample of 37 states, that share their superintendents. Approximately 200 superintendents are involved in these arrangements.[21] Since then, several state legislative incentives have been enacted to encourage the joint employment of a superintendent by two or more rural districts as a cost-saving strategy. The full effect of these is unknown, but for this study's purposes, Sederberg's 1983-84 estimate will be doubled.

A Final Total. Thus, there are approximately 7,900 rural small school superintendents. This figure does not include the approximately 800 one-teacher districts and the estimated 400 multi-district superintendencies. While their number is decreasing, this is an impressive figure.

TABLE 1.5

A COMPARISON OF SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL AND ALL OTHER SUPERINTENDENTS

Characteristic	All Superintendents	ERS Random Sample 1984-85[a] Superintendents of Districts 2,500 or Less	Superintendents of Rural Small School Districts Less Than 2,500	Barker, Muse, & Smith Study of K-12 Districts 900 or Less 1982-83[b]	Barker, Muse, & Smith Study of K-12 Districts 300 or Less 1982-83[c]	Dunne Study of K-12 Districts 300 or Less 1979-80[d]
Sex						
percent male	96.8	96.1	96.0	NA	NA	96.8
percent female	3.2	3.9	4.0	NA	NA	3.2
Age (percent)						
under 30	4	6	6		16/30 to 34	7/less than 30
30 to 39	12.9	16.4	17.3		17/40 to 44	47/31 to 40
40 to 49	32.4	35.0	35.9	average age	18/45 to 49	29/41 to 50
50 to 59	44.3	39.4	39.0	47.1	19/50 to 54	12/51 to 60
60 or above	8.4	7.2	7.2			4/older than 60
Race						
percent Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
percent White	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	93.8
percent Black	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.5
percent Native American	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.2
percent Other Nonwhite	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1.5
Highest Degree Held (percent)						
Bachelor's Degree	1.4	1.8	1.9		1.2	13.9
Master's Degree	51.6	38.1	39.1	55.4	66.1	77.1
Professional Degree Based on Six Years of College Work	10.1	13.8	16.1	31.5	26.7	
Doctor's Degree	36.7	25.9	22.7	13.1	9.8	6.6

KEY: NA = not available.

SOURCES:
a) *Education Opinion Poll: School Superintendents' Opinions and Status*. Educational Research Service, Arlington, Virginia, December 1985, Tables 9-11, pp. 24-26.
b) Barker, Bruce O., "A Description of Rural School Districts in the United States," *The Rural Educator*, Volume 6, Number 3, Spring, 1985, pp. 1-4.
c) Barker, Bruce O., Ivan D. Muse, and Ralph B. Smith, "A Status Report of Rural School Districts in the United States Under 300 Students," *The Rural Educator*, Volume 6, Number 2, Winter, 1984-85, pp. 1-4.
d) Dunne, Faith, *Small Rural Schools in the United States: A Statistical Profile*. The National Rural Center, Washington, D.C. (undated), pp. 29-31.

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A Selected Profile of the Rural Small School Superintendent

What is known about those who serve as superintendents of the nation's rural small school systems? Do they differ substantially from other superintendents on such demographic characteristics as sex, age, or race? What type of childhood community did they come from? What is the nature of their formal training? And are there discernible career patterns that rural superintendents tend to follow?

Only estimations on these questions are possible. The selected profile of a rural small school superintendent that follows draws heavily on the work of the Educational Research Service (ERS), which tracks demographic and career development patterns of superintendents of schools and collects member data for the American Association of School Administrators. It also makes use of Bruce Barker's recent study of the nation's small school districts, those enrolling fewer than 900 students in grades K-12[22]; and data gathered by others on very small K-12 rural districts, those enrolling fewer than 300 students.

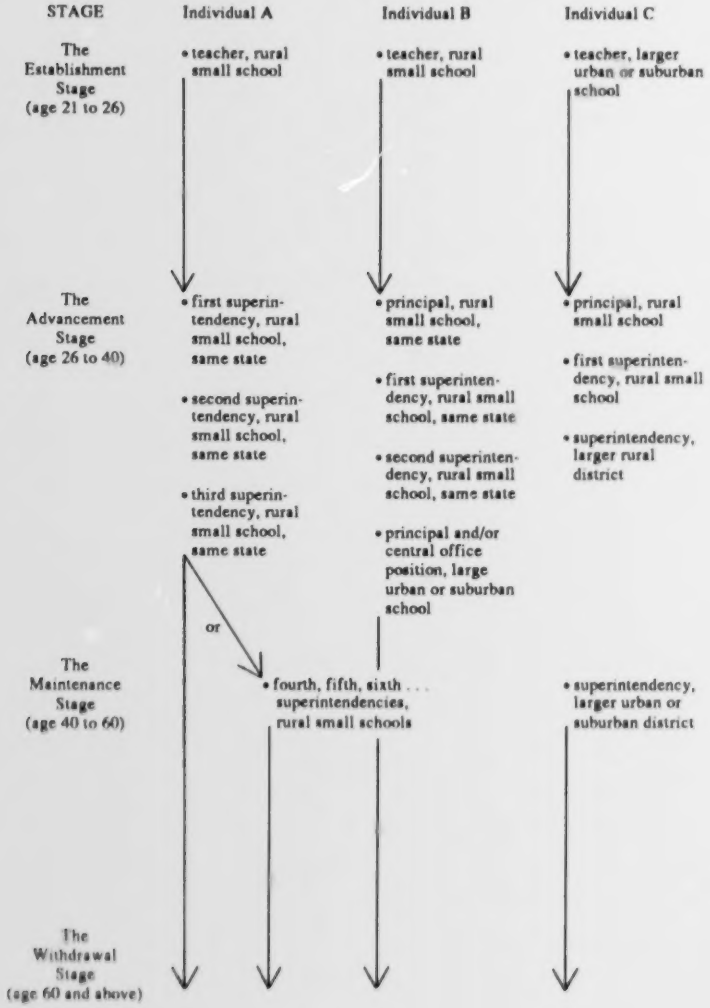
A more comprehensive historical profile of the school superintendency in all enrollment size categories is available from six national reports, one each decade, produced by the American Association of School Administrators since the early 1920s. The most recent of these, authored by Luvern Cunningham and J. T. Hentges, was released in 1982.[23] Previous reports were published in 1923, 1933, 1952, 1960, and 1971. Stephen Knezevich, a leading scholar in educational administration, provides a useful summary of the six AASA reports in a recent text on school administration.[24]

Selected Demographic Characteristics. Estimates on the sex, age, race, and educational background of rural small school superintendents and how they compare with other superintendents on these selected demographics are provided in Table 1.5. The table shows:

- The superintendents of rural small school districts are predominantly male, as is true of all superintendents irrespective of size of enrollment.
- The vast majority of both groups are white.
- The age of superintendents seems to be related to size of enrollment. The average age of rural small school superintendents is younger than for all superintendents.

FIGURE 1.1

ILLUSTRATIVE CAREER ROUTES OF THREE "TYPICAL" RURAL SMALL SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS


STAGE
Individual A
Individual B
Individual C
The Establishment Stage (age 21 to 26)
• teacher, rural small school
• teacher, rural small school
• teacher, larger urban or suburban school
The Advancement Stage (age 26 to 40)
• first superintendency, rural small school, same state
• second superintendency, rural small school, same state
• third superintendency, rural small school, same state
• principal, rural small school, same state
• first superintendency, rural small school, same state
• second superintendency, rural small school, same state
• principal and/or central office position, large urban or suburban school
• principal, rural small school
• first superintendency, rural small school
• superintendency, larger rural district
or
The Maintenance Stage (age 40 to 60)
• fourth, fifth, sixth . . . superintendencies, rural small schools
• superintendency, larger urban or suburban district
The Withdrawal Stage (age 60 and above)

- Superintendents of larger rural small school systems appear to have more formal training than their counterparts in the very smallest systems.

Dunne's work is the only one of the four sources that provides information on the type of childhood community of the rural small school superintendents (60.3 percent grew up in the country or in small towns and about 20 percent in towns of less than 10,000 population).

TABLE 1.6

SELECTED DATA ON THE CAREER PATTERNS OF RURAL SMALL SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS 1984-85

	All Superintendents	Superintendents of Districts Less Than 2,500	Superintendents of Rural Small School Districts Less Than 2,500
Years in Present Position			
1 year	17.8	17.5	18.6
2 years	9.4	9.4	10.3
3 years	9.4	10.1	10.3
4 years	7.2	8.1	8.5
5 years	6.9	7.0	6.8
6 to 8 years	16.4	15.3	16.1
9 to 11 years	10.1	10.2	10.0
12 to 14 years	8.5	8.5	7.0
15 years or more	12.8	13.9	12.4
Total Years Experience as a Superintendent			
1 year	11.3	11.8	12.5
2 years	5.9	6.5	6.9
3 years	6.3	7.5	7.8
4 years	4.1	5.0	5.2
5 years	5.2	5.8	5.8
6 to 8 years	16.9	15.3	15.5
9 to 11 years	11.8	12.3	11.9
12 to 14 years	10.2	9.9	9.3
15 years or more	25.1	25.9	25.1
Number of Superintendencies Held (Including Current)			
1 superintendency	59.5	62.5	61.5
2 superintendencies	22.9	22.5	22.4
3 superintendencies	9.9	9.4	10.0
4 superintendencies	4.0	3.3	3.4
5 superintendencies	.7	.9	1.1
6 or more superintendencies	1.3	1.3	1.5
Positions Held in Education at Any Time			
Elementary School Teacher	36.8	37.3	36.2
Secondary School Teacher	74.7	77.0	78.5
Other Professional/Instructional Staff	13.4	12.8	13.1
Elementary School Principal/ Assistant Principal	35.1	36.8	34.5
Secondary School Principal/ Assistant Principal	57.3	55.4	58.7
Central Office Administrator-Instruction	22.5	14.3	11.3
Central Office Administrator-Business	7.4	5.8	6.0

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TABLE 1.6 (continued)

	All Superintendents	Superintendents of Districts Less Than 2,500	Superintendents of Rural Small School Districts Less Than 2,500
Central Office Administrator-Personnel	4.8	3.1	2.8
Central Office Administrator-Other	17.1	13.5	13.3
Other	5.9	5.0	5.0
Position Held Immediately Prior to Superintendency			
Elementary School Teacher	3.7	5.6	6.0
Secondary School Teacher	6.1	7.6	8.1
Other Professional/Instructional Staff	1.5	2.2	2.6
Elementary School Principal/ Assistant Principal	13.4	16.9	16.1
Secondary School Principal/ Assistant Principal	34.6	42.2	45.8
Central Office Administrator-Instruction	14.5	9.1	6.2
Central Office Administrator-Business	5.1	4.1	4.1
Central Office Administrator-Personnel	3.4	1.7	1.5
Central Office Administrator-Other	11.0	6.7	5.4
Other	6.7	3.9	4.2

SOURCE: Data compiled from the Files of the Educational Research Service, Arlington, Virginia.

Career Patterns. In 1985, the Educational Research Service surveyed a nationwide probability sample of public school superintendents concerning a wide range of topics. Its demographic data provide information on the career patterns of rural small school superintendents. The ERS data on this topic use four enrollment size categories: 10,000 or more students, 2,500 to 9,999 students, 300 to 2,499 students, and fewer than 300 students. It also uses three self-designated community types: urban/suburban, small town, and rural. For this study, ERS computed the number of superintendents of districts enrolling fewer than 2,500 students who designated their communities as rural and not suburban. ERS estimates that approximately 80 percent of the superintendents of districts with fewer than 2,500 students in its national sample truly are rural small school districts.

Five major questions on the career patterns of rural small school district superintendents are reported in Table 1.6. It compares them to superintendents in districts with 300 to 2,500 enrollment and with all superintendents:

- There is little difference in the total years of experience in the present position among the three groups (approximately one-sixth were in the first year of their current position in 1984-85

and a similar percentage of the three groups had comparable tenure in their present position).

- The same general patterns prevail concerning total years as a superintendent.

- Approximately 60 percent of all three groups were in their first superintendency or have held generally the same number of superintendencies in their careers.

- Some differences emerge when the different positions held in education are examined. While a greater percentage of all three groups had secondary rather than elementary school teaching experience and similar prior experience as a school-based administrator, a smaller percentage of rural small school superintendents had central office instructional responsibilities (11.3 percent compared to 22.5 percent).

- A majority of rural small school superintendents held a school-based administrative position immediately prior to assuming their present role. Like their counterparts, few moved into the superintendency directly from the classroom.

TABLE 1.7

SUPERINTENDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH PRESENT POSITION (In Percent)

		Size of Enrollment			
Response	Random Sample Total	10,000 or More	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499	Less Than [a]300
Satisfied	64.2	72.5	64.8	67.1	53.4
Moderately Satisfied	28.4	20.1	27.2	27.6	36.5
Moderately Dissatisfied	5.4	4.0	5.3	3.7	7.3
Dissatisfied	2.1	2.9	2.3	1.6	2.8
No Response		.5	.3		
Total	726	374	301	377	178
(percent)	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0

a) ERS estimates that approximately 80 percent of this total are superintendents of rural small school districts.

SOURCE: *Educator Opinion Poll: School Superintendents: Opinions and Status*, Educational Research Service, Arlington, Virginia, December, 1985, Table 44, p. 70.

TABLE 1.8

CAREER PLANS OF SUPERINTENDENTS

Response	Random Sample Total	Size of Enrollment: 10,000 or More	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499a)	Less Than 300
Educational Administration My Career: I'll Work in Administration As Long As I Can	82.9	85.6	83.1	85.1	78
Undecided: I'm Considering Other Career Opportunities	15.2	11.5	14.6	13.3	19.1
Educational Administration Not My Career: I'll Leave As Soon As I Can	.7	1.6	1.0	.5	1.1
No Response	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.1
Total	726	374	301	377	178
(percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

a) ERS estimates that approximately 80 percent of this total are superintendents of rural small school districts.

SOURCE: *Educator Opinion Poll: School Superintendents: Opinions and Status*, Educational Research Service,, Arlington, Virginia, December, 1985, Table 46, p. 73.

Two recent surveys by ERS tapped the views of superintendents concerning their satisfaction with their present position and career plans. In a random sample of 726 superintendents, almost two-thirds (64.2 percent) indicated satisfaction with their present positions, as shown in Table 1.7. Superintendents of the smallest-enrollment districts indicated the highest level of moderate or general dissatisfaction.

Superintendents of districts of fewer than 300 students were somewhat less positive about choosing school administration as a career and indicated a somewhat higher inclination to leave the administrative field than superintendents in larger districts (Table 1.8).

The rural small school superintendent tends to be a white male and younger than urban or suburban superintendents. Many assumed their first superintendency early in their professional careers. Large numbers subsequently leave the rural school setting and move into larger systems as either the chief executive officer or as a central office specialist.

Notes/References

1. Butterworth, J. E., and Howard A. Dawson, The Model Rural School, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, N.Y., 1952, pp. 135-136.

2. Reeves, F. W., editor, *Education for Rural America*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1945, p. 12.

3. Report on Definitions: *Rural Community, Rural School District, Small School District*, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va., 1984.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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2

Roles Expected, Skills Needed

"I find myself looking forward to going out of town for conferences and meetings. I see very few colleagues unless I leave town. I have only one principal and one administrative assistant to discuss ideas with. There really is no one to ask about everyday things, such as what would you do in this situation? Or, what is your school board like? This definitely is a lonely job."

Brad Madsen, Superintendent
Underwood Public Schools
Underwood, Minnesota

Interest in the quality of work life throughout society has mushroomed in the past two decades because of its relationship to job satisfaction and organizational productivity. However, this focus has its problems because of a variety of definitions of "quality," representing a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. For example, as David Nadler and Edward Lawler, III, point out:

> The quality of work life has been defined as approaches for thinking about an individual's reaction to work, improving work outcomes for both the individual and the organization, enhancing the work environment and making it more productive for the individual, or all of the above.[1]

This chapter takes a middle ground perspective. It defines the quality of work life to mean concern about three major dimensions of the organizational life of the rural small school superintendent:

- The basic nature of the work
- His or her working environment

- The reward system available.

These factors and the literature drawn upon for this study are outlined in Figure 2.1. This chapter covers the first of these, the nature of the work.

The Basic Nature of the Work of Rural School Superintendents. The work of school superintendents has been intensively explored, particularly in the past three decades. In some cases, inquiry has analyzed how superintendents allocate time, with whom time is spent, and the purposes of the activity. Other inquiries have concentrated on the behaviors of superintendents, assuming these will reveal the nature of the work. Still others have emphasized the organizational context of the work.

While the literature on the work of superintendents generally is extensive, this is not the case for superintendents of small rural school districts. However, this is not necessarily a handicap. What rural small school superintendents do, the activities and functions they engage in, the roles they perform, and public and professional expectations about the position differ only in degree, not in substance or mode of operation, from their urban or suburban counterparts.

This study focuses on three critical dimensions: What roles and functions are expected of the rural (and other) superintendent? What roles do they actually perform? And what competencies and skills should they possess to be effective?

Expected Role and Function. The expected role and function of the school superintendent are comprehensive. However, in the organizational literature reviewed for this study, few distinctions were made concerning an urban, suburban, or rural school superintendent. The research assumes the expected role of superintendents is universal.

Twelve different textbooks intended for introductory courses in educational administration published between 1975 and 1986 were reviewed for this study to ascertain how the issue of role differences between the rural and the urban superintendency is perceived. Only two acknowledged a difference according to enrollment in districts. Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan note the special needs of small, medium, and large systems.[2] Wiles and Bondi address differences in the organization of the superintendency and give suggestions for superintendents of small, medium, and large school districts.[3] The only major references to small or rural school districts in the other 10 textbooks related to the authors' discussions of the history of educational administration or their descriptions of school reorganization efforts.

FIGURE 2.1

THE QUALITY OF WORK LIFE OF THE RURAL SMALL SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

Dimensions	The Basic Nature of the Work of the Rural Small School Superintendent	The Work Environment of the Rural Small School Superintendent	The Reward System Available to the Rural Small School Superintendent
Factors Stressed in this Statement	• Expected role and function • Roles performed • Expected competencies and skills	• Commonly recognized major strengths of rural small schools • Commonly recognized major weaknesses of rural small schools • The chronic core problems of staffing and financing rural small schools: one more time	• Design of pay • Fringe benefits • Job security
Major Sources Used in the Discussion	• Syntheses of the contemporary and early literature	• Observations of contemporary and early writers • Perceptions of contemporary and early rural school superintendents and others, where available • The research literature	• Observations of contemporary and early writers • Comparative data provided by Educational Research Service

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Campbell and his colleagues recognized the differences in the complexity of some aspects of the roles played by superintendents when they stated:

> "In sparsely populated school districts ... the superintendent may also double as high school principal and even as part-time teacher. In middle range school districts, the superintendent will ordinarily work directly with school principals and a few central office personnel. In large city school districts, the superintendent may have hundreds of central office, regional, and individual school administrative subordinates. Despite these differences in size and complexity, the superintendent stands at the top of the hierarchy of the organization."[4]

Wiles and Bondi argued for more administrative assistance for the rural superintendent:

> "In many of the smaller school districts (fewer than 300 pupils), the management operation may consist of only a superintendent/principal and a secretary. In districts with more than 1,000 pupils, more personnel are necessary. Indications of a need for more management in a small district include excessive per pupil cost, relatively low achievement test scores, recurrent problems with financial accounting procedures, inadequate personnel services, and excessive turnover of management personnel."[5]

After offering staffing guidelines for schools, Wiles and Bondi conclude:

> "The superintendency poses different problems for the chief educational officer in different environments. In general, the larger the district, the more political the office of the superintendent. And while the tasks of a large-city superintendent are not necessarily more difficult than the managerial role of an intermediate superintendent or the jack-of-all-trades role of a small-district superintendent, they simply call for a different set of skills."[6]

What does the lack of references to the rural school superintendency in textbooks on educational administration reflect? Is it an example of blind negligence in academia? Or is there a widespread

assumption that the expected roles and responsibilities of the chief executive officer are the same, irrespective of the size of the district? The latter probably is the case. Further, this perspective has affected negatively the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent.

Roles Performed. While there is a general consensus concerning public and professional expectations of the work of school administrators, no matter what size the school system, what does the literature say about roles actually performed by these individuals? And are they fundamentally different in any way for rural, urban, or suburban superintendents?

One of the most comprehensive recent views of competencies and skills needed by administrators is the 1982 statement by the American Association of School Administrators Joint Committee for the Advancement of School Administrators and Committee on Higher Education Relationships.[7] *Guidelines for the Preparation of School Administrators* says all students completing a preparation program for school administration should be able to demonstrate competence in seven goal areas (school climate improvement program, political theory and skills, systematic school curriculum, instructional management system, staff development and evaluation systems, allocating resources, and using research). Each goal area includes a large number of competencies, skills, and understandings.

Luvern Cunningham and Thomas Payzant, authors of a 1983 University Council for Educational Administration task force report, acknowledge the continuing need for many of the traditional leadership skills (e.g., goal setting, planning, organizing, climate setting). However, they emphasize eight emerging leadership skills needed: focusing upon the present and future simultaneously; bridging between and among many sectors of interest; mixing scanning, monitoring, and interpreting; adapting to sustained changes; appraising environments; utilizing intuition; decision making and policy development skills; and managing symbols.[8]

Henry Mintzberg, in his definitive study, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, identified eight skills that might be taught prospective managers. These included peer skills, leadership skills, conflict-resolution skills, information-processing skills, skills in decision making under ambiguity, resource-allocation skills, entrepreneurial skills, and skills of introspection.[9]

Again, however, as was true of the review of the basic nature of the work of managers, nowhere in these statements are distinctions made between competencies and skills needed by rural small school superintendents and those by urban or suburban superintendents.

Apparently, there are generic skills all superintendents must possess if they are to successfully contribute to the needs of their districts. But this assumption also creates problems for rural small school administrators.

A Historical Perspective. In the past, the rural school superintendent earned a unique place in discussion of administration. The *1939 AASA Yearbook* suggests the following areas of responsibility of the rural superintendent and specific skills or areas of knowledge desirable to fulfill the responsibilities:

> ***Working with people.*** Must have a thorough understanding of the community and its customs, traditions, and values. All work with teachers and other community members must reflect this understanding.
>
> ***Dealing with money.*** Must have a knowledge of money relationships for teachers' salaries; instructional supplies, equipment, and apparatus; for materials and buildings; and for the improvement of the educational program (an entire chapter was devoted to the description of the responsibilities of the superintendent related to the administration of the budget or the management of expenditures).
>
> ***Adapting administrative techniques to the setting.*** Must be able "to grasp the implications involved in the solutions of the problems of finance, curriculum-making, personnel management, and instruction, and ... develop those generalizations and guiding principles which give a sense of direction and aid in making suitable choices and decisions."[10]

The National Education Association's Department of Rural Education *1950 Yearbook* states the rural superintendent's role is not limited to that of a casual observer:

> "He is an actual participant, directly or indirectly involved in almost every activity, in every phase of the program: pre-planning with teachers and parents; giving bits of encouragement when progress falters because of doubts and uncertainties; gradually re-shaping activities through constructive criticism, pointing out half-hidden dangers in time to avoid them; indicating newly emerging needs that must be met; and striving to create more favorable working conditions for pupils and teachers. No day passes without

> his encountering a host of administrative problems -- tuitions, state aids, local levies, buses, buildings, and playgrounds. One almost needs to have been a superintendent of schools in a rural area to appreciate fully how numerous and varied the school situations are which claim his attention."[11]

After listing 10 major issues in rural education, the *Yearbook* was very direct in establishing the mission of the rural superintendent: "The rural child in every hamlet and on every farm must have as good a chance for an education as his cousin on Main Street. The county or rural superintendent must help him get it. This is his job."[12]

Butterworth and Dawson published a comprehensive statement on the mission, expected roles, skills, and competencies needed by rural school superintendents in 1952. They described the head of the rural community school:

> "He should be the type of person to whom the community turns for advice and leadership on every type of educational question, not merely those relating to the school. Accordingly, he needs to understand the social, economic, and governmental problems of the community as they may affect the school and its program."[13]

They suggest the leader will have had preparation for teaching in the elementary school or in a specific subject area or areas in the high school. In addition, he should have additional courses in "educational psychology, history and philosophy of education, the curriculum, and methods of teaching."

They also say the minimum preparation program should be a "master's degree with reasonable certainty that one or even two years beyond will be required in the not too distant future." (The former is now a standard requirement in all 50 states.) They call for another requirement that is still not widespread: "(A)n important part of his preparation should include apprenticeship experience in a rural community school where the administrator-in-training may secure a realistic understanding of the types of problems ... with which he will be expected to deal." But they also note:

> "Most administrative beginners go into the smaller, usually the rural, communities. Many colleges and universities are not sufficiently realistic in their programs of preparation; they teach 'general' administration (frequently the administration of urban schools) to the neglect of the

adaptations required in or special problems posed by the rural community."

The NEA Department of Rural Education *1957 Yearbook* contains a number of rich examples of differences between the rural and large school district superintendency:

> "The typical school administrator in the United States works in a small twelve-grade school district. He can be distinguished from most superintendents in larger school districts by his direct involvement in all phases of administration. Central office staff members -- directors, coordinators, or consultants -- are seldom found in small school situations. The small school administrator must perform the functions assigned to assistants as well as those executed by the superintendent of a large system. In many instances he is the building principal as well as the school district superintendent. He is not once or twice removed from where policies are put into effect. School problems reach his desk with little delay. The news of trouble in the system hits almost the moment it occurs. His closeness to all that goes on within the school system puts him right on the firing line every day."[14]

The *Yearbook* takes the unusual approach of arguing that these differences are advantageous for rural superintendents. Being close to it all makes communication easier, tasks can be accomplished without dealing with a huge bureaucratic structure, and delegation of authority to teachers and others is an absolute necessity if tasks are to be accomplished.[15]

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3

The Challenging, Changing Work Environment

"All superintendents have times when they feel alone. It is the structure of the job. Usually that happens when you are dealing with a hot issue which you can't discuss with other personnel. As a rural superintendent, it gets pretty lonely when you don't have the answers in a crisis situation and you need insight from other people."

Gail Perkins, Superintendent
Clackamas County School District #108
Estacada, Oregon

Both historical and contemporary observers of rural small schools have consistently cited a number of strengths of these institutions.

Weldon Beckner's recent statement on the advantages of smaller schools presents a comprehensive view. Professor and chairman of the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision, College of Education, Texas Tech University, Beckner cautions against romanticizing the small school, but says:

> "At the same time, it is quite possible that many of the problems encountered in urban and other large school settings might find solutions in small-school traditions and practices. Some of the better known educational 'innovations' of today, which have their roots in the small (and usually rural) schools of the past, include the following: nongraded classrooms, flexible scheduling, individualized instruction, independent study, peer teaching/tutoring, the school as a 'family,' student activities, and parent-teacher

conferences and committees."[1]

Beckner then proceeds to argue that smaller schools have a number of major advantages:

> ***Community Relationships and Control.*** Historically the rural school has served as a community nucleus, with strong support from parents and other community members and close working relationships between the staff and members of the community. The community's awareness of school policies and of what is going on in the school results in a kind of informal accountability. More parental involvement in school activities results in mutual expectations for student behavior.
>
> ***Finance.*** Because citizens feel a more direct relationship to the schools, they tend to be more willing to support them financially. School facilities usually are available for various community uses, and administrators and school board members can exercise clear supervision of school expenditures.
>
> ***Administration.*** Relationships between faculty and administrators (many of whom have some teaching responsibilities) usually are close, and more teachers and students are likely to be involved in making administrative decisions. Administrators' relationships with students, parents, and other community members usually are more cooperative. There is less bureaucracy and red tape; there are fewer regulations. Therefore, it is easier to make changes. Recordkeeping and reporting activities are less complicated.
>
> ***Teachers.*** Because relationships with administrators tend to be more personal, there is a greater sense of community among the staff. In a small school, each teacher must assume a variety of roles, including involvement in guidance functions, thus providing a breadth of perspective to the total school program. Teachers are more likely to be respected as valuable members of the community. They know their students' parents better and, therefore, receive better cooperation in resolving problems that arise. Because teachers have to be generalists, they are more receptive to participating in team teaching, program planning, and other cooperative ventures.

> ***Students.*** School morale tends to be higher in smaller schools. Students have more pride in their community, their school, and in themselves, which results in improved student conduct; because there is less alienation, fewer students have poor attitudes toward school. Students are more likely to approach teachers and other school personnel with individual needs and problems. Because each student is needed, a larger percentage is involved in student activity programs. Because individualization is easier to carry out, students have a greater opportunity to discover their individual identity and potential.
>
> ***Curriculum and Instruction.*** Individualization of instruction is a necessity; therefore the school is more likely to be learner-centered, with more independent study and cross-age grouping. It is easier to make changes in curriculum organization and instructional materials and to achieve curriculum articulation and coordination. It is easier to arrange schedules.[2]

Are these guaranteed advantages for all rural school superintendents? No, as Beckner quickly points out:

> The advantages inherent in small schools are not automatic, of course. If not properly used by administrators and teachers, they could become hindrances to good education. Small class size has little advantage if teachers persist in lecturing when small-group procedures would be more appropriate. Scheduling flexibility could become scheduling inflexibility if administrators persist in using scheduling systems developed for large schools.[3]

James Jess, a past president of the National Rural Education Association and former superintendent of a small rural Iowa school system acknowledged for its innovative programs, reinforces many of Beckner's themes. He identified the following as strengths of rural small school districts: small classes; individual attention to students; many opportunities to develop leadership abilities; higher participation in extracurricular activities; a safe, orderly environment; strong community involvement and support; informal structures that enhance flexibility, creativity, and shared decision making; and the centrality of the school to the community.[4]

One of the few early efforts to view rural school superintendencies positively is reported in the *1939 Yearbook* of the American

Association of School Administrators. In a survey conducted as part of the report, superintendents were asked to list or describe two unique advantages that make employment and work in their systems especially worthwhile for teachers and pupils. Most frequently cited were:

> "Opportunity for intimate acquaintanceship among pupils, parents, and teachers which, if recognized, may lead to a more effective cooperation in the fulfillment of the joint responsibilities of school and home in promoting all-around growth of boys and girls. There is possibility of a prolonged period of contact between pupils and teachers which, if provided, will furnish an advantage in facilitating continuous directed growth.
>
> "The total learning environment can be more readily capitalized in a small community.
>
> "Frequent opportunity for group action of the entire school can lead to self-realization and to the development of desirable social traits.
>
> "The school in the small community provides greater opportunity for democracy in administration and supervision."[5]

Good rural schools have many important strengths similar to features of effective schools confirmed in recent research. These include small classes, individual attention, low dropout rates, safe orderly environment, development of student leadership qualities, strong faculty identity and commitment, parental interest, and community support for the schools.

Major Problems of Rural Schools. The rural school superintendent also inherits a large number of chronic problems.

Jonathan Sher and Stuart Rosenfeld, whose work is responsible for much of the renewed attention by policy makers to the plight of rural schools in the last decade, offer this caution:

> "First, rural schools, unlike small schools elsewhere, must contend with unique problems of sparsity and isolation. This implies more than simply overcoming difficulties caused by geography or distance. It also refers to the fact that rural schools tend to be isolated from the educational,

governmental, and economic support system found in metropolitan areas. It also means that sources of assistance to rural schools (from universities, mental health centers, teacher centers, cultural institutions, and other potential allies) are notably absent in most regions."[6]

In 1984-85, AASA reached approximately one-third of its membership (about 4,000 individuals) in a periodic survey, with nearly one-half of those (49.2 percent) describing themselves as being employed by a rural school district. They were asked to indicate what issue, from a list of 71 possible, was a recent problem or likely to become a problem in the near future. The 10 highest ranking ones were: adequate school financing, curriculum planning and renewal, cost reduction, dismissal of incompetent staff, facility planning, evaluating teachers, collective negotiations with teachers, evaluating instructional programs, in-service training for teachers, and teacher compensation issues.

Nearly two-thirds of the rural superintendents indicated they were presently or soon anticipated a serious or moderate shortage of science and mathematics teachers, and a slight majority (50.6 percent) were experiencing or anticipating a serious or moderate shortage of other teachers.[7]

Beckner, whose ambitious list of advantages of smaller schools is cited earlier, provides an equally candid discussion of major disadvantages of smaller (usually rural) schools. Again, stated fully:

> ***Community Relationships and Control.*** Smaller communities tend to be more conservative and slow to meet the changing needs of students now and in the near future. If the community is isolated, as well as small, there is likely to be cultural impoverishment and parochialism. Because the school is so central to the life of the community, the community may exercise an overbearing influence on the school, particularly relative to values and customs. Most small communities are homogeneous in most respects and therefore provide less opportunity for students to have contact with those from different backgrounds and cultures.
>
> ***Finance.*** Small schools are not inherently efficient financially. To provide a quality program requires a relatively high per-student expenditure. The tradition of paying for schools with local ad valorem taxes causes a wide variation on the ability of small communities to support their schools. Most small communities have only one or two

kinds of economic activity, so when economic misfortune hits one of these tax-supporting businesses, it is difficult for the rest of the community to make up for this loss of support. Most smaller communities tend to have an older, more conservative citizenry, who are usually less able, and less willing, to vote for taxes necessary to support quality schools.

Administration. Administrators in small schools and school districts have little, if any, assistance. Most principals have a part-time secretary at best, and few specialized services to students and teachers are available. Superintendents must complete all the reports and other chores required by state and federal agencies. Small-school administrators are often those with the least experience and professional preparation. There is limited opportunity for professional growth of administrators, because without subordinates to assume responsibilities it is difficult for them to take time away from school. Administrators are particularly susceptible to pressure from the community, because they are in daily contact with parents and community leaders. The potential benefit of close contact with teachers and students may become a disadvantage if relationships are not good.

Teachers. Attracting and keeping quality teachers is one of the greatest difficulties faced by small schools, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Lack of adequate housing is often a problem. Because teachers are frequently isolated from colleagues in their special field, there are limited opportunities for professional interaction. Multiple lesson preparations are usually a necessity. Three or more preparations at the secondary school level are common, and drain a teacher's time and energy. Supportive services to help teachers deal with various student problems, if available at all, are usually limited. Academic freedom is often curtailed by the conservative attitudes of the community and the school board.

Students. Students have fewer choices relative to course offerings and teacher assignments. There are fewer provisions for students needing special education, and fewer support services are available (guidance, counseling, health, psychological, instructional). The usual homogene-

ity of the student body limits their exposure to varied ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural groups of American society.

Curriculum and Instruction. When small schools mimic larger schools in organizing their curriculum, the result often is course offerings with limited scope and depth. Unique organizational and instructional techniques designed to accommodate smaller numbers of students and teachers in smaller schools are largely undeveloped or seldom used.[8]

Jess, whose perceptions of the strengths of rural schools also are mentioned earlier, provided a candid view of "the equally well-known disadvantages or problems for rural schools that are directly related to their small size, population sparsity, and isolation."

"The faculty must teach many different subjects, some out of their major fields; the schools often lack expensive labs, libraries, or specialized equipment; they are often lacking the cultural assets found in urban areas (museums, libraries, theatres, concerts, etc.); they generally lack adequate financial resources; professional salaries are often noncompetitive with their urban and suburban counterparts; heavy workloads, limited resources, low salaries, lack of professional recognition, and low esteem for rural education are factors that make it difficult for rural schools to attract and retain outstanding teachers and administrators; and distances from colleges and universities and between contiguous schools often limit professional interaction, stimulation, and growth among rural educators and within the rural education profession."[9]

Jess adds that "a less obvious, but even greater, disadvantage or problem for rural schools relates directly to what might be considered 'unintentional neglect' by the academic and policy communities."

A comprehensive report on the special problems facing rural and small schools was prepared in 1980 by then Deputy Commissioner Robert R. Spillane of the New York State Department of Education. He first acknowledged the size and isolation factors that create special problems for rural and small schools in New York State, both in meeting student needs and fulfilling requirements of federal and state statutes and regulations. He cited 10 reasons why these problems

exist for that state's large number of rural districts (327 of the state's 679):

- The general decline in enrollment has exaggerated the already serious problems related to small size.
- Real estate values and personal incomes in these districts are low.
- Commerce and industry are at low levels compared to other communities.
- Per-pupil operating costs, construction costs for utilities, and transportation costs are higher.
- Extra costs are incurred as a result of the use of school facilities as a community center.
- Limited staffs cannot deal with the complex problems the districts face, and it is often difficult to secure, hold, and upgrade highly competent teaching and support service staffs.
- Schools must exert extra efforts to provide exposure to cultural resources.
- Scheduling conflicts create barriers to accommodating the needs of individual pupils.
- The resources of other human service agencies to help schools with pupils' special needs are not readily accessible.
- Some schools have difficulty meeting state and federal mandates for children with special needs because the numbers are too small to warrant the services.[10]

Are there special problems and issues for the nation's very smallest rural school districts? Are they dissimilar to the consensus issues discussed above? Two recent efforts to establish the nature of problems faced by the superintendents of very small rural systems were undertaken by a team at Brigham Young University. According to Bruce Barker, the superintendents of school districts enrolling fewer than 900 students listed as their most serious problems:

- Financial support to adequately operate the district

- Improving the school curriculum
- Teacher recruitment, especially in the mathematics and science fields
- Providing adequate in-service training for teachers
- Student-oriented problems, such as the lack of motivation and lack of educational goals and direction (as opposed to drugs, vandalism, alcoholism, or cheating in school).[11]

In their study of systems enrolling fewer than 300 students, Barker, Ivan Muse, and Ralph Smith established the same general patterns, but concluded also that "it is clearly evident that the operation and management of the very small district poses challenges and rewards in many ways uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts."[12]

New or Old Problems? Judged by earlier observations of rural school problems, little has changed over the past decades.

In its 1939 report, the AASA Commission on Schools in Small Communities succinctly observed that the "difficulties of small school systems may be summed up in one brief statement. The problem is how to provide a well-rounded and enriched educational program regardless of the size of the community." The Commission, echoed by Sher and other latter-day students of rural schools, noted that "progress in small schools cannot be made by thinking of school problems in the small community as miniatures of the educational questions facing congested urban areas."[13]

The perceptions of superintendents in small systems probably are not too different from those found in metropolitan areas, the Commission concluded. However, the Commission stressed one major difference -- the isolation in which the small school superintendent must face and solve these problems.

The *1950 Yearbook* of the National Education Association's Department of Rural Education, the forerunner of the present National Rural Education Association, lists 10 major and familiar problems facing rural (and county) superintendents:

1. Higher pay, more personal freedom, and greater opportunity to do good work in city schools attracts capable teachers away from rural schools. Standards of professional preparation for rural teachers in many parts of the country are deplorably low.

2. Poorly arranged and meagerly equipped school buildings perpetuate a narrow, traditionally academic educational program.

3. Severe limitations on bonded indebtedness hinder the construction of new and badly needed buildings.

4. An antiquated system of property taxation continues to be the chief source of school support.

5. Sparsity of population limits the scope of the educational program.

6. Transportation claims a larger and larger share of the rural school budget.

7. Specialized educational services are expensive and difficult to provide in rural areas.

8. An outmoded system of school district organization persists.

9. Instructional demands overreach the means of meeting them.

10. Reshaping the rural school system would require extensive in-service education programs for teachers, remodeling and conditioning of old school buildings and the construction of many new ones, introducing new types of instructional materials into the schools, employment of specialized teachers, extension of library services into rural neighborhoods, and finding new sources of educational support.[14]

The special problems of small schools also was the focus of a National Society for the Study of Education yearbook in the early 1950s. Nelson Henry, who edited the yearbook, places the problems of rural schools in four categories:

- Psychological (e.g., attitudes and values)
- Economic (e.g., low incomes, etc.)
- Inherent in nature of farming (e.g., sparsity of population)
- Result of legislation (e.g., inadequate child-labor and compulsory-education laws).

However, Henry also offered hope:

> "Obstacles to the improvement of rural schools lie within the province of education. These areas are: outmoded district organization, the inappropriateness of the education offered in many rural schools, the poor preparation of teachers and administrators for dealing with rural problems, the shortage of teachers, the high turnover among rural teachers, the lack of in-service education, the outmoded property tax, political influences that block educational progress, and other hindrances to the proper conduct and financing of education."[15]

In the mid-1950s, 150 small school administrators in 20 states were asked by the National Education Association's Department of Rural Education to identify what they regarded as their most pressing issues. They cited four major problems:

- Inadequate district organization
- Providing comprehensive educational opportunities
- Procuring and retaining high quality teaching personnel
- Administrative relationships.[16]

The *Yearbook* also commented on a theme of this book, the "do-it-alone" nature of the rural superintendency:

> The small school superintendent or principal lacks the staff of non-teaching specialists to assist him with the many duties and responsibilities and challenges that meet him every day. He (or she) is supposed to be a supervisor of instruction, transportation officer, publicity director, personnel manager, paymaster, accountant, 'chief complaint receiver,' part-time office secretary, and if the janitor gets sick, he's that, too. Let's not forget that more often than not he's scheduled to teach a class or two which is lucky to see him and much less likely to find him well prepared.... The small school administrator personally participates in the organization and operation of almost every activity in the school program. This type of direct and personal involvement in the total business of education is far more likely to be found in small community school

district administration than in large urban educational systems.[17]

The literature on the special problems of rural schools waned substantially in the 1960s. What was written during this decade tended to reinforce the themes of both the early and more recent literature. It established the perennial nature of basic issues that have historically faced and continue to face rural school superintendents.

Lingering Problems of Financing and Staffing Rural Small Schools

The pervasive issues of financing and staffing rural schools are legendary. These two topics are included in virtually all of the historical as well as more recent statements of problems confronting the rural small school superintendent. They are central to the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent.

As shown in Table 3.1, the mean per-pupil expenditure in 1984-85 for the approximately 1,000 participating systems in the Educational Research Service study was $3,138. The mean per-pupil expenditure for the districts enrolling 300 to 2,499 (not all of them rural) was slightly higher ($3,245) and higher by a relatively significant amount than the mean for the largest districts in the survey, those enrolling 25,000 or more students. On the surface, these comparisons suggest some rural small school districts have relatively more resources available than their larger counterparts. However, the data also support the contention of many that rural schools are more costly to operate.

TABLE 3.1

PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURES FOR CURRENT OPERATION

Enrollment Size	25,000 or more	10,000 to 24,999	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499	Total - All Reporting Districts
Number in Sample Responding	130	269	364	214	977
50th Percentile	$2,898	$2,821	$3,026	$3,098	$2,954
Mean	2,972	2,903	3,309	3,245	3,138
Range					
Low	1,532	1,470	1,596	1,706	1,470
High	5,592	6,419	7,997	7,527	7,997

SOURCE: *Salaries Paid Professional Personnel in Public Schools*, 1984-85, Part 2, Educational Research Service, Inc., Arlington, Virginia, 1985 (Table 3, p. 8).

The ERS data may at least suggest that rural small school districts currently enjoy a degree of fiscal equity and that a number of the relatively ambitious recent reforms in state financial plans enacted across the country are equalizing resources.

Another useful perspective on the financial issues facing rural school districts is to be found in the 1985-86 ERS comparison of the budget expenditures of rural self-designated districts and all other districts. As shown in Table 3.2, the expenditures of rural self-designated districts differed in these important areas:

- A greater percentage of current expenditures devoted to executive administration (2.54 percent compared to 1.92 percent for all districts).

- A smaller percentage of current expenditures (64.04 percent compared to 65.38 percent for all districts), as well as the lesser dollar amount ($2,096 compared to $2,247 for all districts) devoted to total instructional services, including costs associated with providing classroom instruction, books, and materials; auxiliary instructional services; and instructional improvement and development activities.

- A greater percentage of current expenditures devoted to total student services (9.18 percent compared to 7.86 percent for all districts); especially critical here was the 6.32 percent of current expenditures that rural small districts used for transportation services, compared to 4.97 percent for all districts.

What are current staffing issues confronting rural small schools? Again, comprehensive data are difficult to come by and what is available provides at best only a partial view. ERS, which annually publishes compilations on school district staffing patterns, compares staffing practices in four enrollment categories on 13 pupil-staff ratios and 8 teacher-staff ratios. For this study, ERS completed a special computation on self-designated rural small school districts that participated in the 1985-86 study. These data are shown in Table 3.3. Some significant points:

- The mean teacher-pupil ratio of 1 to 17.6 in rural small school districts was slightly smaller than the mean 1 to 19.0 ratio for all reporting systems.

TABLE 3.2

COMPARISON OF TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURES OF RURAL SMALL AND ALL OTHER ENROLLMENT SIZE DISTRICTS, 1985-86

ERS Budget Analysis Categories	All Districts		Rural Sm. Dist 300-2,499		300-2,499		2,500-9,999		10,000-24,999		25,000 or more	
	Per Pupil Exp	% of Current Exp	Per Pupil Exp	% of Current Exp	Per Pupil Exp	% of Current Exp	Per Pupil Exp	% of Current Exp	Per Pupil Exp	% of Current Exp	Per Pupil Exp	% of Current Exp
Number Responding	907		254		357		347		111		91	
Total Current Expenditures	$3457		$3234		$3595		$3465		$3139		$3252	
Board of Education Services	22	.64	26	.79	28	.81	20	.59	14	.47	12	.35
Executive Administration	67	1.92	84	2.54	91	2.55	61	1.77	36	1.13	32	.94
Central and Business Services	90	2.42	66	1.92	81	2.10	91	2.58	99	2.96	102	3.03
School Building Administration	197	5.86	190	5.90	200	5.72	199	5.91	186	5.97	201	6.17
Total Instructional Services	2247	65.38	2096	64.04	2285	63.75	2280	66.23	2095	67.12	2149	66.42
classroom instruction	1876	54.94	1746	53.70	1885	53.07	1916	55.97	1767	56.88	1807	56.08
books and materials	104	2.98	119	3.50	122	3.35	95	2.78	83	2.66	89	2.70
auxiliary instructional services	140	3.96	121	3.70	140	3.82	143	4.02	131	4.10	130	4.05
improvement & development of instruction	45	1.19	17	.53	28	.69	40	1.13	69	2.07	74	2.23
Total Student Services	278	7.86	308	9.18	326	8.98	261	7.58	206	6.42	236	6.98
health and attendance	54	1.43	38	1.07	49	1.22	58	1.47	57	1.74	60	1.74
transportation	172	4.97	206	6.32	209	5.96	155	4.50	123	3.84	140	4.18
food service[a]	13	.36	15	.41	16	.40	12	.34	6	.21	16	.47
student activities[a]	36	.96	45	1.26	48	1.25	35	.95	17	.50	15	.45
Maintenance and Operations	313	8.92	274	8.27	317	8.67	313	8.86	293	9.26	322	9.78
Environmental Conditioning	133	3.89	136	4.17	146	4.07	127	3.72	122	3.84	123	3.82
Other Current Expenditures	110	3.00	105	3.14	122	3.25	115	3.08	89	2.73	68	1.99
Capital Outlay	171	5.18	135	3.81	159	4.10	138	4.38	233	8.07	274	9.00
Debt Retirement	116	3.35	128	3.90	137	3.83	118	3.36	79	2.60	76	2.38
Interest Paid on Debt	77	2.30	74	2.23	74	2.11	79	2.31	74	2.49	84	2.77

NOTE: a/ These data are estimates.

SOURCE: *Local School District Budget Profiles*, Educational Research service, Inc., Arlington, Virginia, 1986.

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TABLE 3.3

ERS COMPARISON OF MEAN NUMBER OF PUPILS PER PROFESSIONAL AND PER ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF MEMBER 1985-86

Position	Enrollment Group: 25,000 or more	10,000 to 24,999	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499	Rural Small School 300-2,499	Total - All Reporting Systems
Number in Sample Reporting	158	451	588	516	226	1,713[a]
Pupils Per Professional Staff Member						
School Building Level Professionals	16.5	17.1	15.8	16.0	16.5	16.3
Teachers	20.2	20.5	18.7	17.6	17.6	19.0
Principals	699.7	691.2	627.0	4,66.3	446.9	609.7
Assistant Principals	1,086.7	1,192.9	1,323.0	1,250.5	1,236.9	1,240.0
Counselors	643.5	776.6	635.4	653.0	640.7	677.6
Librarians	1,286.1	1,610.9	1,081.2	786.8	790.1	1,162.8
School Nurses	4,903.1	3,145.9	1,950.5	1,156.3	1,224.2	2,473.1
Central Office Professionals	571.5	629.0	560.9	571.2	596.0	581.8
Total Professionals	15.9	16.6	15.3	15.3	15.6	15.7
Pupils Per Administrative Staff Member						
School Building Level Administrators	406.7	410.0	397.9	365.1	355.4	393.2
Principals	699.7	691.2	627.0	466.3	446.9	609.7
Assistant Principals	1,086.7	1,192.9	1,323.0	1,250.5	1,236.9	1,240.0
Central Office Professionals	571.5	629.0	560.9	571.2	596.0	581.8
Total Administrators	227.5	236.1	220.8	204.1	205.6	220.8

NOTE: a) The total of 516 responding school systems in the 300-2,499 enrollment category includes the 226 that are designated rural small school districts.

SOURCE: *School Staffing Ratios*, 1985-86, Educational Research Service, Inc., Arlington, Virginia, 1986. Table 1, p. 10.

- Similarly, rural small districts had a lower mean principal-pupil ratio than all other reporting systems (1 to 446.9 compared to 1 to 609.7).

- Rural small systems had lower mean pupil-professional staff ratios for all other school building-level specialists used in the ERS report (assistant principals, counselors, librarians, and school nurses).

- However, the mean pupil-central office professional staff ratio of 596.0 to 1 for rural small school districts was somewhat higher than the mean of 581.6 to 1 for all reporting districts.

As for teacher-professional staff ratios (Table 3.4):

- The mean teacher-school building-level professional staff ratio of 8.2 to 1 for rural small districts was somewhat higher than the mean of 7.0 to 1 for all reporting systems.

- The same pattern of a higher ratio held for rural small schools for the mean teacher-central office professional ratios and teacher-total professional staff ratios.

TABLE 3.4

ERS COMPARISON OF MEAN NUMBER OF TEACHERS PER PROFESSIONAL AND PER ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF MEMBER 1985-86

Position	Enrollment Group: 25,000 or more	10,000 to 24,999	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499	Rural Small School 300-2,499	Total - All Reporting Systems
Number in Sample Responding	158	451	588	516	226	1,713[a]
Teachers Per Professional Staff Member						
School Building Level Professionals	5.8	6.6	6.8	8.1	8.2	7.0
Central Office Professionals	28.5	31.2	30.4	32.9	34.1	31.0
Total Professionals	4.6	5.2	5.3	6.0	6.1	5.4
Teachers Per Administrative Staff Member						
School Building Level Administrators	20.4	20.3	21.7	21.3	20.6	21.1
Principals	35.3	34.4	34.4	27.2	25.9	32.6
Assistant Principals	54.2	58.3	71.9	71.2	70.2	65.5
Central Office Professionals	28.5	31.2	30.4	32.9	34.1	31.0
Total Administrators	11.4	11.7	12.0	11.8	11.9	11.8

NOTE: a) The total of 516 responding school systems in the 300-2,499 enrollment category includes the 226 that are designated rural small school districts.

SOURCE: *School Staffing Ratios*, 1985-86, Educational Research Service, Inc., Arlington, Virginia, 1986. Table 2 p. 10.

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2. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

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4

Rewarding the Rural Superintendent

"Socially, being a rural superintendent is by necessity a lonely job. But you learn to accept that, and other aspects are very rewarding. It's lonely, but certainly not in a negative way."

Most perspectives on enhancing the productivity of individuals in organizations and the effectiveness of the organization itself stress the importance of a reward system. Three of the most important kinds of rewards in educational administration, as well as in other fields, are pay, fringe benefits, and job security.

Design of Pay. According to the yearly report of the Educational Research Service, the salaries of rural small school superintendents probably are substantially lower than those of superintendents in larger districts. As shown in Table 4.1, the mean salary of superintendents of districts enrolling fewer than 2,500 students was $49,000 in 1985-86, compared to a mean salary of $60,000 for superintendents of the next largest enrollment size group (2,500 to 9,999 students) and $76,000 for superintendents of districts enrolling 25,000 or more students. While the actual averages will change over time, these are significant differences even if allowances are made for an average 20- to 30-percent increase in the cost-of-living in large urban areas compared to less populated communities.

Salary differences on this scale apparently have not changed much in the past three-quarters of a century. In a 1914 text, the authors assert that "the pay of a county superintendent (whom they equate with rural superintendent) is rarely more than half as much, and frequently less than a third as is paid the city superintendent."[1] The AASA Commission on Schools in Small Communities reported in 1939 that "salaries show a closer relationship to community size than

TABLE 4.1

CONTRACT SALARIES (IN THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS) PAID SUPERINTENDENTS, 1985-86 SCHOOL YEAR

Enrollment Size	25,000 or more	10,000 to 24,999	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499	Total - All Reporting Districts
Number in Sample Responding	135	264	387	296	1,082
50th Percentile	75	67	60	49	60
Mean	76	66	60	49	61
Range					
Low	47	42	40	31	31
High	114	107	89	87	114

Source: *Salaries Paid Professional Personnel in Public Schools, 1985-86*, Part 2, Educational Research Service, Inc., Arlington, Virginia, 1986 (Table 14, p. 28).

any other factor in the present survey," with smaller communities paying the lowest salaries.[2]

How do current superintendents of rural small districts view their compensations in relationship to their academic preparation, experience, and responsibilities? In a recent ERS random sample of 726 superintendents of different size districts, superintendents of those enrolling fewer than 300 students indicated they were the most dissatisfied, as shown in Table 4.2.

Those dissatisfied with their present compensation also were asked what salary increases they should receive. The superintendents of larger districts generally held higher expectations than did those of the two smaller enrollment categories, as shown in Table 4.3.

Fringe Benefits. Fringe benefits are a standard feature of the compensation plan of public- and private-sector organizations. The most extensive data source on fringe benefits in public education again is provided by the ERS.

ERS supplies data on a wide range of fringe benefit practices, including: transportation allowances; expense account provisions; paid expenses for meetings and conventions; paid professional leave; paid physical examinations; tuition reimbursement; paid group hospitalization, medical/surgical, and dental insurance; group life insurance coverage; long-term disability insurance; individual life insurance; professional liability insurance; paid vacation and personal leave; and sabbatical leave.

The ERS data are reported by five per-pupil expenditure levels of local school systems, the geographic regions of the participating districts and, of interest here, by four enrollment categories. As noted previously, not all of the smallest districts included in the numerous

ERS reports are rural. However, ERS estimates approximately 80 percent are, and so long as this caution is kept in mind, one can get a sense of how the rural small school superintendent fares in comparison to his or her urban or suburban counterpart with respect to fringe benefits.

The ERS information indicates the rural school superintendent may be short-changed. A clear pattern favors superintendents of larger systems. While there is a commonality in the core package generally provided all superintendents (e.g., transportation and liability), the additional programs available to superintendents of larger systems are greater in number and in their comprehensiveness.[3]

Job Security. The third critical dimension of the rural small school superintendent's reward system concerns job security. One way to measure it is to examine tenure in their present positions compared to that of superintendents in larger districts. As established in an earlier chapter, ERS data show the superintendents of rural small school districts enrolling fewer than 2,500 students have the same job security as other superintendents in the 1984-85 random sample.

TABLE 4.2

SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEWS ON APPROPRIATENESS OF PRESENT MONETARY COMPENSATION
(In Percent)

		Size of Enrollment			
Response	Random Sample Total	10,000 or More	2,500 to 9,999	900 to 2,499[a]	Less Than 900
Too little, should be paid more	46.1	44.6	41.5	43.8	56.2
About right	49.2	51.1	54.8	51.5	38.2
Too much, should be paid less	.3			.5	
No response	4.4	4.5	3.7	4.2	5.6
Total	726	374	301	377	178
(percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

a) The ERS estimates that approximately 80 percent of this total are superintendents of rural small school districts.

SOURCE: *Education Opinion Poll: School Superintendents' Opinions and Status*, Educational Research Service, Arlington, Virginia, December, 1985, Table 45A, p. 71.

A recent state study on job security by Alfred Wilson and John Heim examined administrative turnover rates in 265 rural districts in Kansas. The districts had enrollments of 2,000 or less for the six-year period 1978 to 1984. It found a turnover average of 32.33 percent for rural school superintendents for each of the six years; although, as the

TABLE 4.3

SALARY INCREASES NEEDED BY SUPERINTENDENTS DISSATISFIED WITH PRESENT SALARY

Response	Random Sample Total	Size of Enrollment: 10,000 or More	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499[a]	Less Than 300
Less than $5,000	26.8	5.2	9.0	28.5	36.6
$5,000 to $9,999	42.8	31.2	44.1	44.4	43.0
$10,000 to $14,999	24.1	37.0	34.2	21.5	17.2
$15,000 to $19,999	2.7	6.5	6.3	.7	3.2
$20,000 to $24,999	2.0	9.1	3.6	3.5	
$25,000 or more	1.7	11.0	2.7	1.4	
Mean	$7,154	$12,326	$8,845	$7,069	$5,838
Range Low	$ 800	$2,000	$2,000	$1,000	$ 800
High	$71,000	$50,000	$30,000	$71,000	$15,000

a) The ERS estimates that approximately 80 percent of the total are superintendents of rural small school districts.

SOURCE: *Education Opinion Poll: School Superintendents: Opinions and Status*, Educational Research Service, Arlington, Virginia, Table 45B, p. 72.

authors caution, this figure probably is inflated because many superintendents also serve as a principal, and changes in one or the other position would add to the turnover rate in each category. Approximately 90 percent of the districts had one or no superintendent changes during the six-year period.[4]

How do the recent tenure patterns of rural school superintendents compare with those of earlier times? Stephen Knezevich, after examining AASA studies of school superintendents published from 1923 to 1982, concluded:

> "The smaller the school district enrollment the greater the likelihood that the superintendent's contract will be limited to only one year. In contrast, districts with 25,000 or more are likely to issue contracts with terms of 4 years or more. The average contract or appointment period for superintendents was 2.6 years in 1982."[5]

In 1939, the median period of service in the superintendency was nearly six years, according to the AASA Commission *Yearbook*. The Commission notes: "Relatively more of the superintendents of the smallest villages have been on the job one year or less. At the same time, relatively more of the executives of the towns above 2,500 in population have been in their present position for 10 or more years."[6]

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5

New Pressures in Rural Education

"My district is small and rural -- but I also am only a few minutes from the outskirts of Phoenix. So, I have the best of both worlds. I have a really good network of colleagues, and we have both formal and informal relationships through which we discuss our common problems. We meet often, and it is easy to arrange a quick get-together. Without that network, things might be very different. I have noticed that at the annual school law conference, for example, most of the participants are from outlying rural areas where they don't have access to information readily. That's why the support of the state education department and associations is so important for small district superintendents."

Christa Metzger, Superintendent
Tolleson Elementary School, District 17
Tolleson, Arizona

The rural small school superintendent faces an imposing set of circumstances in his or her workplace. A number of these situations confront the superintendent of any district. Nonetheless, many issues are unique to rural schools. Small size, population sparsity, isolation, and the problems triggered by these concerns always have been a part of the basic nature and work environment of the rural superintendency. With these constraints, rural schools have attempted to respond to the three most pervasive policy issues of the past several decades -- ensuring equality of opportunity, enhancing the quality of education, and improving accountability.

However, new pressures face rural small school superintendents and the schools they administer. Again, the large number of issues

cannot all be covered, but the most critical fall into eight categories that almost constitute a conspiracy of circumstances working against rural small schools. Many of these new pressures have great merit. However, together they portend even greater difficulty for the rural schools in the years ahead, coming as they do concurrently with an accelerated interest in the long-term policy issues cited above. They include:

- New changes in enrollment patterns, especially the decline in enrollments and changes in the demographic characteristics of the elementary-secondary school-age population.
- New fiscal constraints on rural schools.
- New realities in staffing rural schools.
- New state school improvement initiatives.
- An acceleration of state control over local school systems.
- New pressure for change in the structure of state systems of elementary-secondary education.
- Adoption of some form of family choice in education.
- New and dramatic changes in the traditional school support interest groups.

All school districts must deal with various versions of this new set of circumstances. However, the new pressures will have a particularly devastating impact on many of the nation's rural small districts. They could turn the widely acknowledged rural school strengths into weaknesses, compounding already difficult situations caused by the traditional problems facing rural schools.

Changes in Enrollment Patterns. Two features of the enrollment patterns of the elementary-secondary school-age population are of particular interest here: the decline in the number of students in this age cohort, and changes in the demographic characteristics of the group.

Total enrollment in the nation's public school districts declined 10.7 percent between 1970 and 1980, and an additional 4 percent from 1980 to 1983.[1] The U.S. Department of Education projects a slight increase (approximately 1.9 million students) to approximately 41.1

million by 1992, due largely to the "mini baby-boom" of the early 1980s.[2] Only six states, all of them in the West, experienced enrollment increases from 1973 to 1983. The remaining states plus the District of Columbia experienced declining enrollments during the same period. The most serious enrollment losses were in states in the Northeast and Midwest, both regions with large numbers of rural small school districts.

Changes in the demographic characteristics of the school-age population also offer potential challenges. Harold L. Hodgkinson, a Washington-based demographics expert, has tracked these changes for a number of years. He has identified 23 consequences of demographic changes for elementary-secondary and post-secondary education. They include:

- More children entering school from poor households.
- More children entering school from single-parent households.
- More children from minority backgrounds.
- A larger number of children who were premature babies, leading to more learning difficulties in school.
- More children whose parents were not married, now 12 of every 100 births.
- More "latch-key" children and children from "blended" families as a result of remarriage of one original parent.
- More children from teenage mothers.
- Fewer white, middle-class, suburban children, with day care (once the province of the poor) becoming a middle-class norm as well, as more women enter the work force.
- A continuing decline in the level of retention to high school graduation in virtually all states, except for minorities.
- A continued drop in the number of minority high school graduates who apply for college.
- A continued drop in the number of high school graduates, concentrated most heavily in the Northeast.

- Increased numbers of Asian-American students, but with more from Indonesia, and with increasing language difficulties.[3]

How these projected demographic changes will impact on rural small schools is uncertain. However, even a modest change in the demographic make-up of the student population attending rural schools along the lines predicted by Hodgkinson would have a significant impact on the ability of these schools to respond to the new challenges.

As one example, many rural school districts already experience great difficulty in complying with current state and federal requirements for the education of handicapped children. Projected increases in the eligible pool of handicapped students would, of course, complicate further the programming, staffing, and financial difficulties faced by rural small school district superintendents and boards of education. Another obvious implication derived from Hodgkinson's work is the need for more and better bilingual programs, again a historically costly program and staffing issue for many rural schools.

The New Fiscal Realities. Compounding enrollment declines and projected changes in the composition of the student population of many rural schools are long-term fiscal changes in the economic support base of many rural communities. And nowhere is this probably more serious than for rural schools in predominantly agricultural communities. Tom Stinson of the University of Minnesota has noted:

> "It is particularly ironic that, at a time when service demands on rural local governments are increasing, their principal revenue sources are falling. This unfortunate coincidence is like hailstones dropping on an already damaged corn crop."[4]

His study of 8 midwestern states established that: Net farm income in the areas studied was down 40 percent from the 1970 averages, sharply affecting rural businesses and eliminating jobs. The income decline experienced by the agriculture economy has contributed to a 30 percent drop in farm land value in the last 4 years. These declines have led to an erosion of local tax bases and contributed to increases in property tax delinquencies.[5]

Among rural local governmental subdivisions, school districts are more than likely suffering the most because of their reliance on property taxes for a substantial portion of their revenues. This development, which many predict will be long-term, certainly bodes ill for rural small schools, many of which historically have had to deal with

limited resources. Moreover, competition with other public services is likely to intensify, program cutbacks may be necessary and, because of more limited resources, many rural schools will be at even greater disadvantage in competing for staff.

New Staffing Realities. Recruitment and retention of quality teachers, especially at the secondary level and particularly in the science and mathematics fields, already are at a crisis stage for many rural school districts. The effect of new certification requirements and the prospect of even more stringent requirements being enacted in the near future, no matter how meritorious these might be, will complicate the historical problem of both the quantity and quality of staff. Other proposed staffing reforms, such as differentiated staffing, career ladders and other versions of merit pay, also will likely have the same effect. Roy Forbes, in a paper for the National Rural Education Forum in 1985, captured the dilemma posed by the rush to increase teacher certification requirements and the problems this will create for small schools:

> Small high schools do not have the luxury of having a foreign language teacher who teaches only foreign language. Science teachers are often required to teach mathematics or other courses. English teachers are expected to have dual or triple certificates in schools that may have two or eight classes of high school English. Small rural high schools require teachers who have certification in more than one learning area, yet the trend is toward more in-depth single certification. Increased certification requirements often result in the decertification of teachers who have previously taught some courses. It may also decrease the number of new teachers with multiple certification. These two effects combine to make the assignment of teachers more difficult in small rural secondary schools.[6]

In another paper delivered at the same conference, Jerry Horn, after describing in some depth the current teacher preparation reform movement, expressed even greater concern about the difficulties facing rural schools:

> It seems apparent that considerable energy is being directed toward teacher education programs. However, the unique roles and responsibilities of teachers in rural and small schools are not being considered. In effect, this will likely magnify the impact -- programs for rural teachers will not

> be developed because they will not *match* accreditation standards and, due to the move to greater specialization and extended programs, fewer teachers will be able to obtain multiple teaching endorsements and/or take college work that will better prepare them to work and live in a rural community.[7]

The current ferment in teacher education and the way schools are likely to be staffed in the future, either through new mandates or as a result of voluntary efforts to improve staffing practices, will profoundly affect rural small schools.

Efforts to improve the quality of the teaching force are welcome. But policy communities need to realize that rural small schools will be affected adversely by this move.

State-Sponsored School Improvement Initiatives. Further complicating the work of the rural school superintendent is the wave of state-sponsored school improvement initiatives under way in many states.

The "first round" witnessed the now well-known flurry of national and state blue-ribbon commission reports following the issuance in 1983 of the U.S. Department of Education's report, *A Nation At Risk*. A large number of state legislative and education agency initiatives were enacted immediately prior to and following the publication of this report. While the focus of these efforts varied from state to state, certain central themes emerged. An AASA report, using data provided by the Education Commission of the States, summarized the state-sponsored school improvement efforts under way by the end of 1984:

> "Forty-eight states had considered new high school graduation requirements, and 35 had approved changes. Twenty-one states had taken steps to improve textbooks and instructional materials. Eight states had approved lengthening the school day or year or passed other mandates lengthening the amount of time for instruction. Twenty-four had considered some kind of master teacher or career ladder program."[8]

Other state initiatives require smaller classes in the early grades, new programs for educationally disadvantaged four-year-olds, increased salaries for teachers, stiffer certification requirements for teachers and administrators, as was previously discussed, and a host of other requirements. And, sometimes at the urging of state legislatures

or through voluntary action, many post-secondary institutions have established new admissions standards.

No matter what their merit, these new state school improvement initiatives likely will exacerbate already difficult circumstances for rural superintendents.

A number of speculations about the consequences for rural schools of the "first wave" of state school improvement activities have been undertaken. One early estimate of the resources required to implement the recommendations of *A Nation At Risk*, developed by Allan Odden, projected that revenues would need to be increased by approximately 20 percent to fund most of the proposals.[9] Not all of these costs would necessarily be borne by local school districts, but the tradition of state underfunding of mandates should be of little comfort. Ivan Muse's work also looked at the impact of *A Nation At Risk*, which influenced the direction of much state-sponsored activity. Stressing the economic and staffing implications for rural schools of the report's recommendations, Muse pleaded that:

> If the Commission's recommendations are to be implemented by rural schools, it is essential that the Commission and U.S. Department of Education recognize the unique characteristics of rural schools and provide appropriately different strategies to enable rural schools to meet these goals.[10]

Another, more recent, assessment of the potential impact of the broad-based state-sponsored school improvement initiatives was undertaken by Roy Forbes, who looked at curriculum, facilities, services, and organization, observing in all cases that rural schools likely will experience great difficulty in meeting the new requirements.[11]

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell believes this nation is about to launch a second, more comprehensive, approach to school reform. It will include a demand by the citizenry for educational "choice," the prominence of computers in teaching, local autonomy at the school building level and strengthening the role of the principal, more English and mathematics programs, state-mandated testing of student academic achievement, and improvements in teacher education and a push for career ladders.[12]

Bell's predictions of the impending state-sponsored school improvement initiatives, if even reasonably accurate, would add further to the difficulties facing rural small schools. The fiscal impact of the new initiatives alone would be significant.

However, not all observers share Bell's predictions of another round of state-sponsored school improvement initiatives. Michael Kirst of Stanford University, who has documented education reforms, recently offered an important caution:

> In my view, the critical policy question for the next five years is whether the reform movement will maintain its momentum. If it does, then expenditures for education will outstrip inflation and the underlying negative trends will remain in the background. However, if the public and key policy makers perceive that education reform has failed or has not been properly implemented, then a less favorable future is likely.[13]

An Acceleration of State Control. More state control over elementary-secondary education, which began well before the state-initiated school improvement initiatives of the past few years, is well documented by many observers of school governance.[14] The broad-based school reform efforts under way across the country merely have accelerated it, illustrated by the numerous examples of new state requirements cited previously.

As impressive as the acceleration toward more state control has been in the past few years, perhaps the most awesome exercise of state power is still on the horizon. One of the recommendations of the Task Force on Readiness of the National Governors Association report on education urges states to establish a mechanism for state intervention into school districts when progress is not being made with low-achieving students.[15]

The state, of course, always has had plenary authority over the schools. But the concept of placing a poorly performing school system into a form of receivership represents a major radical extension of that authority. The Task Force is careful to establish a number of actions (provision of technical assistance) that ought to precede this step.[16] But the threat of state assumption is clear. No matter what the rationale for this recommendation, the receivership concept is a move toward the "one best system" mentality that could have a particularly destructive impact on rural small school districts.

Press for Structural Change in State Systems. Conscientious state legislators and state education agency personnel, faced with the special circumstances of large rural segments of elementary-secondary education, can be expected to look for modifications that can alleviate the problems facing rural small schools.

Another round of massive school consolidation similar to that launched in many states in the 1950s and 1960s and the establishment of incentives and disincentives to achieve the same objective are likely to be major alternatives considered. For example, current efforts underway in Minnesota to restructure elementary-secondary education are ambitious. In the Minnesota plan, the traditional six-year secondary program would be phased out and replaced by four years of secondary schooling and two years (grades 11 and 12) of specialized education provided by specialized high schools, community colleges, vocational and technical schools, universities, or private schools.[17] The consequences of this restructuring plan on the large number of rural schools of the state could be particularly significant.

New Pressures for Enactment of Some Form of Family Choice. Advocates for policies to break up the public school monopoly appear to have gained new energy from the widespread perspective by some groups that public education is a failure and must be completely overhauled. Many critics recommend greater family choice.

Most observers are aware of efforts at the federal level to expand family choice. Chris Pipho, a staff member of the Education Commission of the States, has tracked similar initiatives in a number of states, alerting the policy and professional communities to the potential consequences of these initiatives for rural schools.[18]

The loss of even as few a number as 10 to 12 secondary school students would cause many small districts to further reduce their course offerings, have greater difficulty in justifying the employment of needed staff specialists, or suffer a loss of state aid if the latter is based in whole or in part on enrollment, as many state aid programs are.

Enactment of some form of family choice option is a popular idea. However, an example of what appears to be new, more widespread support in the policy communities for enactment of a family choice option is the 1986 endorsement by the National Governors Association:

> Expand opportunities for students by adopting legislation permitting families to select from among kindergarten to twelfth-grade public schools in the state. High school students should be able to attend accredited public post-secondary degree-granting institutions during their junior and senior years.[19]

Changes in Traditional School Support Interest Groups. Dramatic changes are taking place in the number of parents with children in school. In the past, parents were the most effective school support interest group. Parents of children attending school are the most interested in seeing that their children's education is the best possible. They are more likely to vote in favor of operating expenditures where these are required, and they tend to support capital improvement programs more than those who do not have a vital stake in the schools. Moreover, parents of school-age children are more likely to be deeply committed to the internal workings of the school and to follow external developments at the state and federal levels. While this problem is of concern to all schools, the consequences clearly will be greater for the rural school district simply because there are fewer parents in rural communities to begin with.

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6

How to Help the Rural Superintendent

"Many of the decisions I made were lonely ones. I didn't have the resources I needed at my fingertips, like I have now. One aspect that makes it lonely is that you don't have colleagues nearby. You can't call up someone for lunch to discuss problems with. But the loneliest moments would be when I was driving around those country roads at 5 a.m. in the morning in a snowstorm trying to decide if the buses should start rolling at 6 a.m. You're the only guy in the whole place who can make that decision. Unless it's a total blizzard, whatever you decide is wrong. If you go into the coffee shop later that morning and there are 10 farmers sitting there, 5 will say you did right and 5 will wonder what was in your head."

Bert Hagemann, Superintendent
Brookfield School District #95
Brookfield, Illinois
(former superintendent at Erie, Illinois)

The problems confronting the rural small school superintendent are staggering. Schools in a rural setting have been and will continue to be an important part of most state systems of elementary-secondary education. But rural superintendents work under great stress and with comparatively fewer rewards. New pressures facing rural education will make their roles even more difficult.

In the past, a number of policies and programs at the federal, state, and local levels have addressed the issues confronting the rural small school superintendent. Many have been highly successful.

However, many also have been fragmented, inadequate, frequently competitive, and lacking an overall rationale. A new approach is needed. Comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive policies and programs that look at the total role of the rural superintendent would address the underlying issue -- measurably improving the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent.

This concluding section contains recommendations for an expanded, enriched, and focused support system for the rural small school superintendent. Its 21 themes would provide the comprehensive plan that is needed (Figure 6.1). The recommendations establish the general directions and avoid being overly prescriptive. Policy makers and other participants at the local, regional, state, and national levels are best able to fully develop the concepts in the recommendations.

Many of the recommendations represent new initiatives, but the majority originate from the work of others. They are included here because of their significance to the rural school improvement efforts which are the focus of this report. Indeed, a number of them take on added meaning and structure when incorporated into a comprehensive and cohesive policy to improve the quality of work life for rural superintendents.

Improving the Basic Nature of the Work Expected

Earlier, a description of the basic nature of the work to be performed covered the professional expectations of the role and function of the position, the roles actually performed by the rural superintendent, and the expected competencies and skills of the individual.

The following recommendations propose more sensible views of the work of the rural superintendent and, in addition, suggest ways to better prepare individuals for the realities of the work of the rural superintendency.

1. **A More Realistic View.** Those who develop professional statements on the work of the American school superintendency must develop more realistic views of the rural small school setting. Obviously, good management practices must be uppermost in the work of the rural small school superintendent if the district is to prosper.

However, many rural administrators, both in the short run as well as over time, can successfully address several, but not all, of the

FIGURE 6.1

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HELPING THE RURAL SMALL SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

Focus of the Recommendations	QWL Dimensions Recommendation Previously Directed At
• adoption of a more realistic view of expected role and function • adoption of a more realistic view of roles performed • adoption of a more realistic view of expected competencies and skills • changes in preparation programs and certification requirements • expansion and enrichment of career development programs	No. I The Basic Nature of the Work
• expansion and enrichment of instruction and management support systems • addressing the chronic finance problem • addressing the chronic staffing problem • promotion of interdistrict collaboration • promotion of rural community service integration • improvements in school board-superintendent relations • needed reconceptualization of technical assistance	No. II The Work Environment
• promoting equity in the design of pay • promoting equity in the comprehensiveness of fringe benefits • enhancing tenure possibilities • expanding recognition of exemplary performance	No. III The Reward Systems Available
• expansion of research and information services • expansion of professional development programs • expansion of personal support system • greater use of mentor systems • strengthen and expand rural interest groups	Spans Multiple Dimensions

expected roles and functions. Time demands, resource availability, and the absence of support staff are the principal problems facing many rural school superintendents, particularly those serving extremely small rural systems.

It would seem that greater recognition in the literature of major constraints on the rural small school superintendency would both lessen unreasonable expectations and promote greater interest in seeking options to overcoming real dilemmas confronting many rural administrators.

2. **A More Realistic View of Roles Performed.** Similarly, a more realistic view of the roles performed by rural small school superintendents is needed. Although this view is based primarily on intuition and spotty evidence, it is very likely that most rural small school administrators are forced to make compromises in their managerial roles.

This is not to argue for a lessening of the role of rural small school administrators at a time when education clearly needs more, not less, from its leadership. Rather, it calls attention to the need for a

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more realistic view of what one individual or a small group of leadership personnel can successfully do.

3. A More Realistic View of Expected Competencies and Skills. Consistent with the preceding recommendations, there needs to a more realistic view of the competencies and skills that can be expected of a single individual responsible for providing the instructional and management direction of a rural small school district.

Current proposals for education improvement, which usually include greater competence among leadership personnel, are likely to accelerate in the future as the pivotal role of management in school excellence is more understood.

Good thinking is needed about requisite competencies and skills. However, there seems to be a need for "a test of reasonableness" in the aspirations about the abilities one individual can be expected to have. Many of the more ambitious statements seem more appropriate for consideration of a management team, not a single individual.

Therefore, those who produce recommendations specifying what is required in education management should give greater consideration to both job and situational variables peculiar to urban, suburban, and rural small school systems. The recent initiative undertaken by the American Association of School Administrators to establish an assessment center/professional development service could provide much-needed attention to differing competencies and skills needed by school superintendents.

4. Changes in Preparation Programs and Certification Requirements. Completion of a formal university or college preparation program and satisfaction of certification requirements established by a state education agency are the two traditional hurdles that most individuals must pass through successfully to be eligible for employment as a rural small school superintendent. Both requirements can contribute to or detract from improvement of the basic nature of the work expected of the rural superintendent.

To improve preparation programs, colleges and universities that prepare significant numbers of individuals for the rural small school superintendency need to make certain:

- The conceptual knowledge component of the general academic core they offer emphasizes the peculiarities of urban, suburban, and rural school district administration.
- The conceptual knowledge component of the specialized preparation reflects the same differences.

- The clinical component of the program is not only extensive, but also provides meaningful experiences in a rural setting forthose who aspire to be a rural small school superintendent.

- They staff the program, either through an exchange program or on a rotating basis, with individuals who have successful prior administrative experience in a rural small school district.

Moreover, state education agencies should strengthen their program approval practices to ensure that colleges and university preparation programs have this rural perspective.

State education agency certification requirements also can make important contributions. One would be the addition and careful monitoring of the recommended requirement of an extended internship by those who seek a superintendency in a rural school system. Another would be the addition of a requirement that candidates for certification successfully complete an assessment exercise demonstrating skills judged to be important for the administration of a rural system.

5. **Expansion and Enrichment of Career Development Programs.** A number of other career development programs could contribute to improving the workplace of the rural small school superintendency.

For example, more extensive use of pre-admission diagnostic skill exercises by colleges and universities and the use of the results in admission decisions (as well as in program planning) could identify a candidate's aptitude for the rural small school superintendency. It makes good sense for both the prospective candidate and for the institution to discover as early as possible the degree of compatibility between a student's expectations and the nature of rural school administration. The literature on career counseling contains a number of instruments that could be modified for use in an activity of this type. College and university programs also should include other career orientation activities, such as the frequent use of guest lecturers by rural school superintendents, on-site visitations at rural districts, and frequent student interviews of rural superintendents. These should be in addition to extended clinical experiences in a rural small school.

Meaningful orientation of new rural superintendents also would help prepare individuals for the realities of the rural small school workplace. The state education agency, colleges and universities, education service agencies where they exist, and state professional associations of school administrators should collaborate to provide a

desired mix of both theoretical and practical perspectives to help those just beginning their careers in a rural superintendency.

Finally, greater attention must be given to the career development needs of experienced rural small school superintendents. Few specially designed career development efforts are aimed at assisting mid-career superintendents. It would appear that colleges and universities are ideally suited to assume a primary role for both graduates of their programs and any mid-career superintendent as well (supplementing the mid-career development from an individual's peers or mentors).

Improving the Work Environment of the Rural Superintendent

The profile of the work environment of the rural small school superintendent already presented and the discussion of new pressures facing rural districts should suggest to even the most skeptical that the quality of work life of many rural superintendents is presently troublesome and becoming more so. In sum:

- To be certain, many rural small school superintendents of good rural districts enjoy a workplace that would be the envy of many other superintendents -- small classes, opportunity for individualized programs, numerous opportunities for students to develop leadership skills, strong commitment of faculty, active parental and community involvement, and other characteristics now recognized as features of effective schools.
  However, not all rural small school superintendents enjoy these advantages. Many contend with the perennial problems of inadequate financial support, the recruitment and retention of staff, lack of program comprehensiveness and instructional support systems, and other problems triggered by isolation and population sparsity.

- Moreover, many of the exemplary rural small school districts will have increasing difficulty in sustaining their status as they try to respond to unprecedented new pressures.

The following seven recommendations address these realities:

6. **Expand and Enrich Instructional and Management Support Systems.** Proposals to improve support systems in rural areas that seem most useful in addressing deficiencies in the instructional program and management operations of rural small schools include:

- The use of an educational service agency to provide services for exceptional children, curriculum consultant services, media services, staff development services, and a full range of management support services for a group of rural districts.

- The creation of regional secondary vocational-technical schools to serve a cluster of rural districts or the shifting of many advanced vocational-technical programs to an area community college that would serve secondary school-age populations of participating rural schools.

- The creation of regional special education schools to serve the special need populations of a cluster of rural districts.

- The use of telecommunications to provide advanced instructional programs to a rural district.

These major options illustrate that there are numerous policy choices available to address the limitations of rural small schools. Many have been in place for a number of years and have demonstrated their ability to improve the quality of the instructional programs and management services of rural districts in a cost-effective manner.

Thus, there are ways to substantially reduce what is probably the single most discouraging work aspect confronting the conscientious and dedicated rural small school superintendent -- acknowledgment that rural education will be seriously limited unless these problems can be resolved. Successful options are being demonstrated daily all across this nation.

7. **Addressing the Chronic Finance Problem.** Similarly, there are many proposals for alleviating the financial limitations facing many rural small schools. Deserving special attention:

- The frequent call for greater use of "over-burden" factors in state financial allocation schemes that acknowledge higher per-pupil costs related to small size, geographic location, or other extenuating conditions beyond the reasonable control of a rural district.

- The development of more meaningful measures of school district wealth, effort, and the relationship between these factors in the design of state aid formulas.

- Greater commitment by the state to follow any new mandate with corresponding resources needed by a rural district to implement the requirement.

8. **Addressing the Chronic Staffing Problem.** The recruitment, retention, and continuous professional development of faculty are perennial core problems facing the rural small school superintendent. Many proposals have been advanced that address this issue. The following have particular merit:

- More extensive development of a rural school focus in the teacher pre-service preparation programs offered by colleges and universities serving a significant number of rural districts.
- More extensive use of regional and state-sponsored recruitment strategies.
- Greater flexibility in (but not a lessening in the quality of) teacher certification requirements.
- Greater use of interdistrict sharing of highly specialized staff.
- Greater use of joint appointments with post-secondary institutions, particularly content specialists on the faculty of community colleges and four-year colleges.
- Greater use of salary incentives in state-aid formulas as a strategy for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural districts.

Concerning professional development of the rural school staff, these frequently advanced proposals are especially meaningful:

- More extensive use of interdistrict collaboration to provide professional development activities.
- More extensive use of telecommunications for professional development programs and services.
- Greater use of extended contracts to encourage intensive professional development activities during the summer months.
- Mandating of professional development for rural (and other) teachers; the earmarking of state monies to support such an initiative; and the linking of professional development, evaluation, and recertification practices.

9. **Promotion of Interdistrict Collaboration.** One of the centerpieces of the three preceding areas of recommendations calls for greater use of interdistrict collaboration.

A consensus exists on many of the prerequisite conditions that promote interdistrict, or interorganizational, collaboration -- a common mission of the partners, geographic proximity, realization of mutual benefit, awareness of others, and good interpersonal relations among the actors.

However, the literature on other determinates is mixed, particularly whether it is preferable to mandate interorganizational collaboration or allow it to form voluntarily. While the voluntary approach may be preferable, the position of the state education agency is critical. Where the state is indifferent or actively, but unofficially, opposed, reliance on the voluntary approach is not likely to result in the extensive development of collaboration. Where the state is open in its support, seeks to provide planning, fiscal, and programming incentives, and makes use of innumerable other supporters of collaboration, widespread development of voluntary arrangements is likely to occur.

Many state education agencies actively have supported voluntary collaboration. Others have not, and need to reconsider their positions, given the incredible problems confronting the large number of rural small school districts and the many demonstrable benefits that interdistrict collaboration can provide.

10. **Promotion of Rural Community Service Integration.** Another cross-cutting recommendation that can contribute to rural school instruction and management, as well as address the two chronic problems of financing and staffing, is to integrate rural community services, especially in the human services field.

Revisiting this old concept is particularly valuable at this time. Most governmental agencies responsible for providing equal access to all citizens in the state are confronted with circumstances similar to those facing the education policy communities. Some of the most promising school and other rural governmental subdivisions' joint activities include joint:

- Centralized purchasing and warehousing
- Recreational programs and services
- Library programs and services
- Use of public facilities

- Health programs and services
- Lunch programs
- Transportation programs.

The potential these examples of program and service integration have for improving the efficiency and quality of rural programs and services is great. A renewed commitment by state, regional, and local levels to explore community service integration would make good policy and programmatic sense.

11. **Improving School Board-Superintendent Relations.** Tension between the school board and superintendent probably is as prevalent in a rural school setting as elsewhere and represents a perplexing impediment to a wholesome work environment. Perplexing because the problem continues despite numerous efforts in the past to address it, particularly the joint endeavors of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and AASA. A good deal of solid thinking about the common forms of friction between school boards and superintendents exists, as well as proposals to clarify the roles each should play.

These jointly developed guidelines are readily available to all. What is needed is a greater commitment by both parties in local districts to both the spirit and intent of the guidelines. This would substantially reduce the negative consequences of poor school board-superintendent relations on the work environment of the rural small school superintendent. Improvements in this area probably represent one of the most easily attainable goals of any proposed in this statement.

12. **Improvements in Technical Assistance.** This statement consistently calls for greater and different forms of assistance to the rural small school superintendent. It does not, however, favor a continuation of traditional technical assistance provided rural small districts by state agencies, colleges and universities, education service agency-type organizations, or others.

Rather, the traditional, typically one-shot, assistance efforts should be replaced by capacity building that is sustained, long-term improvement aimed at helping the rural superintendent to solve his or her own problems and manage his or her own affairs.

This perspective would be very uncomfortable for adherents to the "one best way" approach to problem solving. Capacity building argues that there are numerous ways to achieve a goal and that the

individual most knowledgeable about the best way to attain a goal is the one closest to the problem and who has the greatest stake in its achievement. What this person most needs is training in problem definition and in alternative ways to resolve a problem, not some pre-prescribed, packaged, ready-to-wear solution.

Improving the Rural Superintendent's Reward System

Many see the prevailing practice of paying rural small school superintendents substantially lower salaries compared to their counterparts in larger size districts as professionally unfair. Similarly, the more comprehensive fringe benefits generally received by superintendents of larger districts also indirectly lessen the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent.

The first three of the following recommendations relate directly to the reward system discussed earlier. The fourth concerns another feature increasingly recognized as important -- a needed expansion of the ways to recognize exemplary performance.

13. **Promoting Equity in Pay.** The prevailing wide disparities in the design of pay for rural small school superintendents compared to their counterparts in larger districts are indefensible on several counts. Pay surely is one of the most significant contributors to the quality of work life. The research literature is relatively conclusive on the association between an employee's perception of the fairness of his or her pay and the job satisfaction and performance.

At a minimum, a renewed commitment to narrow the historical gap in the pay of superintendents of differing enrollment size districts would go a long way toward enhancing the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent and stopping the exodus of many who probably feel compelled to seek positions in larger districts for economic gain.

Moreover, the demands of the position of a rural small superintendent, as compared to that of a suburban or urban superintendent, while different in important ways, are not less. Finally, all superintendencies, wherever they function, are critical in any meaningful and sustaining effort for school improvement. The concern should be about attracting and retaining high-quality individuals in this profession. An important incentive to achieve this goal is a salary that is professionally competitive and market-sensitive.

14. **Promoting Equity in Fringe Benefits.** The arguments for equity in the comprehensiveness of the fringe benefits available to the rural small school superintendent are similar to those concerning the need for equity in pay. However, it should be pointed out that the nature of the fringe benefit package available to an employee is becoming an increasingly important employment decision in education, as in all professions.

15. **Enhancing Tenure Possibilities.** It is some surprise that the available recent data suggest rural small school superintendents enjoy the same relative degree of job tenure as other superintendents. Spotty historical data show that rural small superintendents enjoyed less job security in earlier times.

More important, however, is the prevailing pattern in rural schools on two significant employment practices that bear directly on tenure patterns -- selection practices and evaluation practices. Rural systems have not generally developed the same level of sophistication in these two areas as have larger systems.

Good selection decisions result in the employment of the best possible person for a position and thus enhance the ability of the district to retain that individual once selected. Boards of education should develop policy statements that ensure meaningful job descriptions related to actual job requirements; specify the criteria to be used; establish the processes that are to be followed; and commit resources for meaningful searches. Where they exist, regional service agencies should provide technical assistance to local boards in these instances, as well as consider the establishment of programs to develop as large an applicant pool as possible.

Local boards also should develop meaningful superintendent evaluation practices. The AASA and the NSBA have collaborated continuously over time on guidelines concerning the most effective and equitable evaluation processes for use by local governing boards. These joint statements represent a lot of good thinking, and adhering to them would go a long way to ensure the evaluation of the rural small school superintendent is both meaningful and equitable.

16. **Expanding Recognition for Exemplary Performance.** As important as equity in pay and fringe benefits, the enhancement of tenure is another dimension of the reward system that can contribute to the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent. This is the meaningful recognition of exemplary performance.

In the past two years, a number of national professional associations have launched efforts to recognize the performance of rural small superintendents. The new program sponsored by NSBA in 1986,

The Executive Educator 100, is perhaps the most ambitious effort of this type. While one qualification used by NSBA in this award program (chief executive officers of districts of fewer than 2,500 students) resulted in the selection of some individuals from small suburban systems in the first annual program, most of those recognized by a 9-member panel of jurors were superintendents of rural small schools. This is an excellent, long-overdue program. The National Rural Education Association also has initiated an annual program to recognize outstanding rural superintendents.

While not related directly to the superintendency, the efforts of the U.S. Department of Education to initiate a Rural Schools Recognition Program patterned after its national secondary and elementary school recognition program also is encouraging.

Similar efforts in recognizing exemplary rural superintendents and school systems should be considered more widely at the state level. Sponsorship or joint endorsement of such activities are well within the mission statements of the state professional associations of school administrators.

Other Recommendations to Improve the Quality of Work Life

Five additional recommendations are discussed here separately because they span two or more dimensions of the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent.

17. **Expansion of Research and Information Systems.** The limited research base on rural small schools is a major constraint on the development of meaningful policies and programs that address the needs of rural education. Several years ago one of the authors offered seven explanations for the paucity of research on rural education:

- Lack of appreciation for the demonstrable differences between rural and urban schools.
- Lack of appeal in the academic community.
- Lack of a large number of professionals who devote their careers to the continuous study of rural education.
- Little networking in the research and professional communities.

- Lack of perceived crisis.
- Confusion concerning the domain of rural education.
- The late emergence of the National Institute of Education that ultimately supported much of the research that had been done.

In the same article, the author suggested several initiatives. Two essential steps were the development of a small number of overarching research paradigms and the development of an initial consensus on the work needed to be done within those paradigms. The other initiatives centered on the development of a meaningful taxonomy of rural schools, support for university research centers that specialize in rural education, support for rural education journals, and the establishment of a process for promoting rural initiatives judged by the profession to be vital.

In a relative sense, much progress has been made on many of these fronts in the past two to three years, especially:

- The recent work by Doris Helge, director of the National Rural and Small Schools Consortium, and the more modest but still useful effort by the National Rural Education Association to establish a research agenda for rural education. While the initial independent attempts of these two groups produced some differences, there were substantial areas of agreement.
- Increased networking in the research, professional, and policy communities that is occurring in part, at least, because of the renewed attention given rural education by a number of national professional associations, especially the AASA, the NSBA, and the special interest group on rural education of the American Educational Research Association.
- The increased number and enhanced quality of journals devoted to rural education research and development, especially *Research in Rural Education*, published at the University of Maine, Orono, and *Journal of Rural and Small Schools*, published at Western Washington University.

There are other encouraging developments that could also be cited as evidence that the existing meager and largely non-additive research literature on rural education will be at least partially rectified in the future. It is important that this momentum of recent years be sustained over time and accelerated.

18. Expansion and Enrichment of Professional Development. The continuous, career-long professional development of a superintendent is a priority of the highest order. The superintendency is one of the most demanding positions in education and the conceptual, analytical, and technical knowledge and skills required to be effective require continuous reinforcement and enrichment.

Professional development opportunities for rural small school superintendents historically have been available from national and state professional associations, colleges and universities, and other public and private organizations. However, these efforts frequently are fragmented, lacking in focus, of questionable quality, inaccessible, or have other shortcomings.

All states should promote aggressively the continuous professional development of all superintendents. However, unlike the mandated requirements recently enacted in several states that focus on clock or credit hours, a quality initiative would:

- Require each local board, in collaboration with its superintendent, to design periodically an individualized professional development plan (IPDP) for the superintendent, as well as reflect the existing and projected needs of the organization.

- Require the evaluation of the superintendent to be based in large measure on whether the IPDP has been achieved successfully.

- Require the certificate of a practicing superintendent to be renewed every five years. One of the requirements for renewal should be based (and verified by an independent panel) on whether the candidate has successfully met the conditions established in the IPDP.

Linking professional development to evaluation practices and then further linking both of these to the requirement for certification renewal provide an additional and needed focus to all three, largely heretofore unconnected activities. The recommendation that a superintendent's certificate be renewed is likely to be controversial. There is no merit in continuing the prevailing current practice that virtually amounts to life-long certification.

Several other steps need to be taken to make the above proposals work as well as to make other improvements in professional development activities. Financial resources to support a meaningful program are, of course, basic prerequisites. States should earmark a minimum percentage of state aid for elementary-secondary education for staff

development. Also, state education agencies should take the lead in bringing together all of the professional development providers in their state (e.g., colleges and universities, education service agencies, professional associations) and develop a long-range, master plan of professional development for the rural small school superintendent. This approach would promote better coordination of staff development, encourage the exploration and use of the most effective and efficient delivery modes, and promote the development of quality programs.

19. **Expansion of Personal Support Systems.** The increasing attention being given to the important connection between employee stress and productivity is long overdue. The extent that rural small school superintendents experience stress is not known. But surely they are not immune from traditional job-related or extra-organizational factors that cause stress. Indeed, given the magnitude of the challenges facing them, the rural superintendent potentially is in an extremely stressful environment. The profession should take aggressive steps to help that person who truly "stands alone."

Many of the recommendations contained elsewhere in this statement, of course, will contribute to reducing job-related stress. However, there are a number of other, more direct efforts that should be considered.

For example, the recent AASA promotion of a wellness program for schools has done much to call attention to the issue and should be continued. Further, state professional associations might consider the implementation of a superintendent assistance center, linked perhaps in some way to mentoring (see below). There are many other useful strategies that need to be explored. Every effort should be made to reduce job-related pressures on the rural small school superintendency, not only for humanitarian reasons but to counter potential higher turnover rates, greater job dissatisfaction, lower productivity, and other negative consequences of stress.

20. **Greater Use of Mentor Systems.** The mentorship, especially for newly appointed rural small school superintendents, also could enhance the quality of work life by providing the neophyte administrator an accessible source of counsel for discussions of problems encountered in the workplace.

Informal mentoring is probably as old as the profession. One of the authors assumed his first superintendency in a small district next to a relatively large district, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that was staffed by a full range of highly knowledgeable subject matter curriculum consultants and individuals in all of the major management specialties (e.g.,

finance, planning, transportation, school lunch). The superintendent not only personally responded to every request for counsel, but also made it possible for the novice to confer with his central office curriculum and management specialists. It is highly unlikely the superintendent was aware of the mentoring role he provided (the term was not a popular one then), but rather viewed his activity as one way of giving back to the profession, a commitment he felt strongly about. For the novice rural superintendent, however, this arrangement proved to be of immeasurable benefit, helping him over numerous problems and issues.

Individuals of this quality are to be found throughout the profession. Therefore, a mentorship program should be formalized in every state. State associations of school administrators are the logical units to assume responsibility for planning a system of this type. Where they exist, regional service agencies could play a role in coordinating the activities at the sub-state levels.

21. **Strengthen and Expand Rural Interest Groups.** In both an absolute sense and in relative terms, there are more professional and lay interest groups concerned about rural elementary-secondary education functioning at the national and state levels today than at any prior time in history. Several new efforts have emerged at the national level in recent years, notably the Rural District Forum of the NSBA; the National Rural and Small School Consortium; and the clear revitalization of two older professional associations, the National Rural Education Association, formed in 1907, and the rural school initiatives of the AASA that started again in earnest in 1979. An even more impressive pattern is true at the state level where, by one count, there are currently nine states with formally organized rural education interest groups. Most of these were formed in the past few years. The most ambitious (e.g., Iowa, New York, Minnesota) annually sponsor a state and/or regional convention, several employ a lobbyist, some are beginning to sponsor research, and all publish an organization newsletter. In still other states, rural interests have chosen to form a rural unit within the state professional associations of school administrators or school boards, rather than opt for a separate association.

These are encouraging developments and need to be expanded and enriched. Other national professional associations whose membership is composed of many individuals working in or with rural small schools need to focus their commitment and resources to better serve their rural constituency. State professional associations have a similar obligation.

AASA should continue to update its highly successful 1983 publication, *The Sourcebook: A Directory of Resources for Small and*

Rural School Districts, and expand its coverage to include a section especially targeted on resources available to the rural small school administrator. *The Sourcebook* has contributed substantially to the development of networks of rural interest groups. The recent joint effort of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools and the National Rural Education Association, in producing *A Directory of Organizations and Programs in Rural Education* has contributed to the same goal.

A strengthened and expanded rural education network across the country will help create and sustain a rural education focus on the agendas of national and state professional and policy communities. This should result in improvements in rural small schools and, consequently, in the enhancement of the quality of work life of the rural small school superintendent.

What the Rural Small School Superintendent Should Do

Perhaps the most important prerequisite is what the individual rural superintendent must do. All of these meaningful strategies will fall short, indeed many will fail miserably, unless the superintendent, and prospective superintendent, bring a certain perspective and deep commitment to the position.

But what kind of perspective and what level of commitment are needed?

The first requirement is for the existing (and prospective) superintendent to acknowledge that he or she has the ultimate responsibility to understand the nature of the position, aware that there are certain inherent limitations and inescapable realities in rural small school management, even in the best of situations. Those who lead (or aspire to lead) rural small schools should be as conscious of the consequences of these realities as policy makers. This awareness should occur early in career planning. Many potential candidates, as well as those currently serving as superintendents, will still opt to accept the challenges of the position and appreciate fully the professional rewards that can be realized by leadership in dealing with the issues.

Accepting this perspective should motivate the superintendent to continuously focus his or her time and energy on the most important responsibilities and forget the frequent frustrations of trying to be all things and do all things. This would mean delegating some activities to others. A superintendent then would learn that shared decision making with others not only makes good management and organizational sense, but is likely to add to the quality of work life.

A third requirement of the superintendent is to accept ultimate responsibility for career-long professional development. The recommendation to link the superintendent's professional development to his or her evaluation and to join these two activities to certification renewal should prove an important incentive. However, the entire process begins with a candid discussion between the superintendent and his or her governing board concerning the former's strengths and weaknesses. A superintendent cannot be responsible, of course, for how a board is likely to perceive his or her strengths and weaknesses. What the superintendent can control, though, is the commitment to engage in the discussion with candor and a high level of integrity. Moreover, the superintendent is in the best strategic position to judge the existing and projected needs of the district. These are important for the design of a useful professional development program. Only the superintendent can provide these two prerequisites.

Concluding Comments

In the past, rural small schools have made important contributions to the nation. Still responsible for educating one-third of the students, they can continue to do so in the future but face imposing circumstances that are likely to diminish their effectiveness unless the policy communities address their problems. The centerpiece of efforts to maintain viable rural school districts should be the development of comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive policies that enhance the quality of work life of the rural superintendent.

The problems facing the nation's rural small schools make a compelling case that something extraordinary must be done. These recommendations are directed at achieving the lofty goal of establishing a structure to ensure that happens.

The main thesis is that the key to school improvement initiatives in virtually all state systems of elementary and secondary education is the quality of individuals who serve as superintendents, or chief executive officers, of rural districts. Moreover, the quality of individuals who can be encouraged to seek and maintain a career-long commitment to rural districts largely will depend on the ability of policy makers to ensure their positions are professionally challenging, rewarding, do-able, and not quite so lonesome!

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